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NEW SPORTS

MAGAZINE

Vol. 5

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ALL STORIES NEW



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THE SCORE BOARD

PEPPER MARTIN, Wild Horse of the Osage, signed up for another whirl at fame. Pepper Martin is well remembered as the star of the '31 World Series who, almost single-handed, brought the baseball championship of the world to the famed old Gashouse Gang, the St. Louis Cardinals. In the last seventeen years, Pepper Martin has been a man of many jobs. He has been a major league outfielder and third baseman, a minor league manager and pitcher, and a baseball scout for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Now, Branch Rickey has signed him up to play with his Brooklyn Dodgers—the pigskin Dodgers! That's right! Old Pepper Martin has been signed to do the place-kicking for Brooklyn's football Dodgers!

Is there no limit to the wonder of the Wild Horse of the Osage?

"THE pitchers of today are too soft. They don't work enough," said an Ohio farmer on his eighty-first birthday. He was Denton Tecumseh Young, a living baseball legend, a mound ace with an arm as durable as a band of steel.

The grizzled old pitcher still looks like a sturdy oak, although he confessed that he was "slipping just a little," because he can't see very well now.

What a pitcher Cy Young was! He pitched for twenty-two years in the big leagues, hurled three no-hit, no-run classics, struck out a total of 2,832 batters

and won 511 games. He was forty-four when he finally quit pitching in the major leagues, and strangely enough he quit pitching not because his rubber arm was tiring at last, but because he had become disgusted with himself because he had grown too fat to field bunts!

PRESIDENT Frank C. Lane, in his latest instructions to the arbiters of the American Association, says that umpires should make an attempt to cultivate a sense of humor.

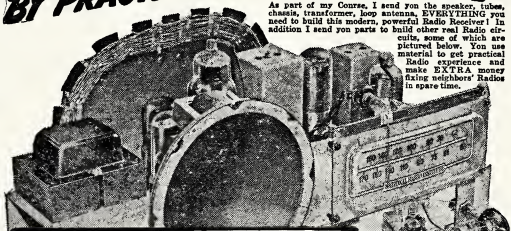
A minor league umpire once exercised his sense of humor while officiating in a Texas League game. He made a close decision that didn't please the Ft. Worth players. So they ganged up on umpire Doyle. By the time the police intervened, umpire Doyle was on the ground, almost unconscious.

After the game, as the Ft. Worth players were dressing in their locker room, Doyle walked in. This time, the umpire commanded the full respect of all the ball-players present, for in his right hand he held a revolver. The players froze in fear. He commanded each and every Ft. Worth player to crawl to him on his hands and knees and apologize. After the last frightened player had complied, umpire Doyle showed his sense of humor. Before he walked out of the room, he said, "You ought to know that if I'd had to shoot you bunch of cowardly skunks I'd have had to put bullets in this gun."

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DIAMOND DUSTERS

Sometimes a team—or player—gets so bad it's funny . . . or gets so funny it's bad. Either way, it's often a laugh that makes—or breaks—a man, a team, or even a pennant race!

IN A game with Washington, Gomez was doing a great shutout job on the Senators when, entrenched behind a comfortable four-run lead, he suddenly tossed the shutout away with a most inexplicable maneuver. With runners on first and third and one out, a ball was batted squarely at Gomez. He fielded it flawlessly and turned toward second base to start what promised to be an easy double play.

But, however, to everyone's stunned amazement, Lefty, instead of throwing the ball to Frankie Crosetti, who already was standing on the keystone bag, fired it to Tony Lazzeri who was standing some twenty feet to the right of the base. The result, of course, was that nobody was retired, the runner on third scored and Gomez had to bear down to retire two more batters.

Asked after the game by a reporter what had possessed him to make such a crazy play, Gomez smiled broadly.

"Well, you see, it was this way. You fellows have been writing for years what a wonderfully smart player Lazzeri is. So when I got my hands on the ball I let him have it and hollered, 'Hey, Tony, let's see you do something with this one.' Just seeing the expression on Tony's face was worth losing the shutout."

Certainly no one ever got any more enjoyment out of life and baseball than Rabbit Maranville who, despite at times an utter disregard for training rules, contrived to play right up to forty, when a broken leg finally terminated his career. He was at all times a brilliant shortstop, wrapped up in a bundle of laughs.

There was the time a group of business

(Continued on page 95)

By **WILLIAM R. COX**

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With a totally unexpected toss
he hung the ball dead in front
of Mercer. . .

FIGHT, SCRUB, FIGHT!

CHAPTER ONE

One Man's Way

ANTHONY STREGA stood tall and straight at the edge of the practice field, where the grass was autumn tarnished and torn with cleats. Sunrise, behind him, cast a long and brooding shadow that bisected the faded white lines.

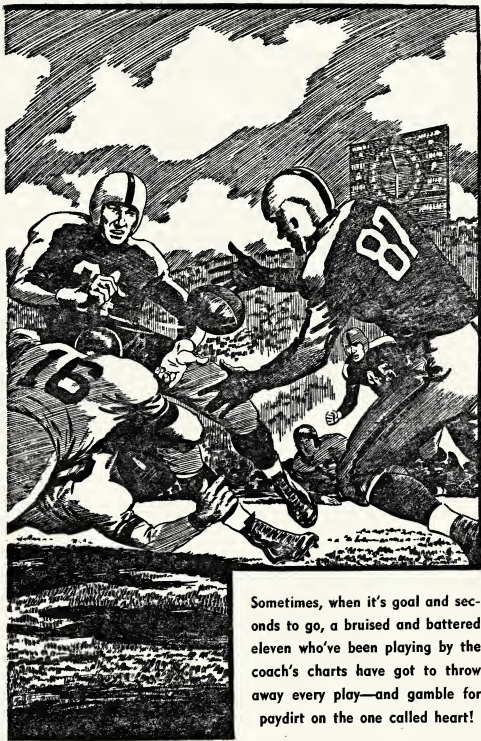
In the end it all came down to a question of mathematics and dimension. Take eleven men and train them so that each would act as an extension of his own body, then place them on a rigidly defined area, carefully instructed in a series of maneuvers that would inexorably carry the ball the length of the field.

It was the welling red line made by the surgeon's scalpel, the dividers against the navigator's chart—it was real and under-



By

JOHN D. MacDONALD



Sometimes, when it's goal and seconds to go, a bruised and battered eleven who've been playing by the coach's charts have got to throw away every play—and gamble for paydirt on the one called heart!

standable, and thus a satisfying occupation, uncomplicated by emotional perplexities, by sloppy thinking.

He stood and felt the power that was in him, the determination and the coldness, and at last he turned and walked with long strides back to the small frame house they had given him at the far end of faculty row.

As he walked back he thought of Jackson's report about the Greely ends playing too wide and in his mind he made various compensations for that defect, selected the one most likely to take the best advantage. And he smiled tightly as he thought of the quality of the Greely coaching staff, a staff that would permit the ends to play too wide.

If he were back with the pro team he would look with suspicion on the wide ends and he would sense a trap. But in this small college league, this younger brother of the Ivy League, traps were not so devious.

His destiny was as clear in his mind as though it had been charted. His square brown hands were tight on the helm and there would be no deviation.

He entered the house by the back door. Loren, her eyes still misted with sleep, smiled at him, lifted her lips to be kissed. She was Irish and her dark hair was black as a raven's wing, her blue eyes warm and tender and gently mocking.

After eight months of marriage she was the only segment of his life that contained the unexpected, that consistently remained unpredictable.

Her lips were warm and, as he sat down, she got up and went over to the stove to start his breakfast.

"Walking and worrying?" she asked.

"Just walking, Loren. You don't have to worry when you know what you can do."

"Two and two is always four, huh?" Her warm voice held laughter.

He felt the rising sharpness of his tone. "Always!"

She set the orange juice in front of him, rumbled his hair. "Not always, darling," she said softly.

The anger faded. "Not always for you, you Irish mystic. Just for me. I know what I can do and what I can't do. Life gives you a full return on the investment."

She sat down suddenly, cocked her head on one side, her chin resting on her fist. "Tony, lad," she said. "You are a nice guy and I love you. But you can't measure everything and weigh it and tie it down. Don't you know that?"

He grinned. "No, I don't."

"You'll learn it one day."

"Or you'll learn my way."

They left it at that. In their eight months of marriage it had become a fixed gambit, the grooves worn deep.

He had told her of the way life had forced his philosophy down his throat. He had been born a year after his parents had arrived in New York from the north of Italy. When he was five his father had fallen to his death from the steel framework of a new building. When he was seven he was a runny-nosed kid, ragged and sharp and scrawny, toting a shoe-shine box around Times Square and the Public Library, chased by cops, beaten by the older kids, contemptuous of the squalid apathy into which his mother had sunk.

Then an uncle had come on the scene, a jovial but miserly man who had gotten hold of truck-farm acreage in New Jersey, who was looking for cheap labor, who brought pale little Tony Strega out to work exhausting hours on the land.

He had begun to grow then, to fill out. When he was fourteen he was nearly six feet tall and weighed a hundred and seventy. On his fifteenth birthday he thrashed his uncle and won the right to continue with school.

Life had begun to pay dividends. He became an All New Jersey high-school back, and received bids from half a dozen colleges. He cannily selected the college

on the basis of the kind of football played there. He liked tough, hard, competent ball.

Two years of All American play got him a berth on a pro team. They called him the "Mechanical Man." Tall, tough, hard, merciless and exact. In the Army he played on service teams. When he was discharged he was twenty-nine. Though he was flat-bellied, wide-shouldered, hard as a slab of granite, he knew that the rate of muscle regeneration was fading. Split-second timing was gone for good; powerful legs lacked the spring they had once had.

In college he had been careful to wipe out the last traces of his beginnings by learning to speak with care, to balance a tea cup if necessary, keep his mouth shut when there was nothing to be gained by speaking. He was handsome in a dour way, impressive in the way he carried himself—slowly, carefully, but with a hint of power.

And so he made a circuit of high schools and in 1946 he took over the coaching job at a school which had a poor record. After three defeats he built up a string of twenty-two victories in a row. On the basis of that record, Adams College hired him.

Two days after the contract was signed in January, he had married Loren Quinn.

The road ahead was clear. He would make his record at Adams as impressive as the record at the high school. There would be other offers. Bigger offers. And in the end there would be a top-flight school, an impressive contract, a national reputation.

He knew that he would achieve all those things by doing what he knew how to do in the way he knew best how to do it. Tight, hard, competent football. Dimensional mathematics. Plays that snapped like a bull whip handled by boys who had been given so many hours in fundamentals that they could block, tackle, handle the ball with the precision of professionals.

He put a sketch pad beside his plate and, as he ate awkwardly with his left hand, he outlined the play variations which would take advantage of those wide ends on the Greely team.

ADAMS was a small school. The alumni group wanted a good team. They had financed Tony Strega's intensive travel from January to June, had backed up his offers of scholarships and jobs to the boys he wanted.

Adams was in a sleepy little town, and it had been a college almost since the nation had been free. Once it had had great football teams. Tradition hung over the college like a proud banner, and Anthony Strega was mildly amused at the poorly concealed scorn of ancient faculty professors who privately decied the "descent into commercialism."

He pushed the pad aside, looked across the small table. Loren's eyes were speculative over the white rim of her coffee cup. "The battle all planned?" she asked.

"All planned. We've got a chance. A fair chance to tie. A slim chance to win."

"They're good?"

He shrugged. "Greely has been recruiting longer than we have. They've had a tougher schedule. We took Barnum seven-six. They made it twenty-nothing. But we've been improving with each game. I can't see that they have."

"You know, Tony, this Adams is quite a place."

He raised one eyebrow. "You like it?"

"I like it a lot, hon. It begins to get you after a while."

"Don't let it get you too much, baby. It might make it too much of a chore to tear yourself loose."

"It doesn't get you, does it, Tony?"

"Get me? I don't know what you mean. I walked into a tough job here. I'm doing okay. That makes me like the place."

"Oh, I mean the sense of time, of this school having been here so long. The list

of the names of the boys who were killed in the Civil War. The chapel bell and all that."

Tony looked at her incredulously and then laughed. "Baby, you're falling for corn. Adams has been here a long time. But so what? You're falling for a lot of green lawns and ivy and gray-stone buildings."

"Two and two is always four, huh?" she asked for the second time that morning.

He had no desire to carry on the same old argument. He stood up, tossed his napkin on the table.

"Sit down a minute, Tony, darling. Just for a minute. I went to that tea yesterday at Mrs. Grayson's. She's a sweet old gal, Tony."

"Grayson is the one with the spinach. The old boy who's as old as the buildings?"

"Yes, and the two of them are fans. Real fans. Mrs. Grayson asked me a lot about the team."

"So?"

"So are you going to use Mercer and White on Saturday?"

Tony felt the hot flush of anger. "What goes on around this place, anyway? For two weeks I've been getting the needle on those boys. Look, baby, I've got a small squad. Exactly twenty-four boys. Divide that by eleven and you get two teams with two guys left over. Believe me, those two guys left over are Mercer and White. If I'd been able to do just a little more recruiting, they wouldn't be on the squad at all."

"But it's always been—"

"I know, I know," he said roughly. "In Nineteen Hundred and One Frank Mercer and Julius White played in the backfield and helped win the Greely game. In Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-five Frank Mercer, Jr. and Julius White, Jr., seniors like their pappies had been, helped win the Greely game. Now I've got Frank Mercer, the third, and Julius White, the

third, and this is their last year, and so I just naturally put them in and they win the Greely game. Nuts!"

"But don't you see, Tony, that—"

"I don't see a thing. My first-string backfield is Forsi. Jabella, Stanisk and Maroney. Frank Mercer is third-string fullback. He's big and he looks rugged, but I can't cure him of flinching away from a tackle. He just plain doesn't go for physical contact. Julius White is eager as hell, but he's too frail. He doesn't go over one-fifty-five. Ten more pounds and I could make a decent scatback out of him. I'm putting winning teams on the field. If they want tradition they can all go climb the chapel tower and beat on the bell."

"You won't use them?"

He shrugged. "When there's two or three minutes to play and we have a lead of at least two touchdowns I could send them in for old time's sake, I guess."

"Like a man throwing a dog a bone?"

"Just like a man throwing a dog a bone. I'm thinking of Tony Strega. First, last and all the time. Nobody else but you in this wide world gives a damn about Tony Strega. So I put them in. So we lose the game. Am I the guy who upheld tradition? Not on your life! I'm the guy with a hole in his season record. Believe me."

"You're hard, Tony," she said softly.

His anger was gone. He shrugged. "Maybe. At least not soft in the head. I'm sorry I blew. But I've had old grads showing big bellies up against me for two weeks now, telling me that they're looking forward to the way the boys are going to lick Greely. To them, the "boys" are Mercer and White. Today is Wednesday. They'll keep needling me right up until game time, but after we rack up the win they'll forget all about Mercer and White."

"But what about the boys themselves, Tony? How are those two boys going to feel?"

He reached over and took her hand.

"Honey, if I spent my time worrying about hurting the feelings of the boys on the squad, I might just as well buy a pick and start looking for a construction gang."

CHAPTER TWO

Diagram for Glory

AT THE beginning of the afternoon session he instructed Chug Davis, the line coach, in what he wanted done with the fourteen linemen, and he took the ten backfield men down to the far end of the field.

An intense believer in demonstration, Tony Strega trotted along with them in uniform. He looked over the ten men and wished he had more depth.

In Forsi, the alert quarterback, and Stanisk, the fleet left half, he knew that he had two top men. Jabella, fullback, and Maroney, right half, were almost as good.

He had leaned hard on the squad, whipping them with sarcasm when they fluffed, giving them quiet words of praise when they worked well. He had instilled in them the professional spirit, the feeling that they were men doing men's work capably and well, without foolishness, without wildness.

They gathered round. "Forsi, Jabella, Stanisk and Maroney. I'll center. I want the sixty-series run, Stanisk the man in motion. Greely ends are playing wide. So, Maroney, in the sixty-series you play a yard deeper and a few feet wider. Got it?"

Maroney nodded.

"The rest of you watch close."

The backfield lined up with snap and, at the call, Strega rifled the ball back. Forsi faked a hand-off to Stanisk, faded back. Stanisk ran straight out, cut back sharply toward the line, turned and gathered in the jump pass that Forsi fed him. Maroney had come in just beyond Stanisk.

"That should do it," Strega said. "If

the end is wide you can block him off quicker from the deeper position. Run it twice more, and we'll work our way up the series."

When he was satisfied with performance, he gave the four men a break, put in Newcomb, Laddis, Sharma and Brankoff. He said, "We haven't got enough men to make a clean split on offensive and defensive. So you boys have to know this just as well as Forsi and his mob does. Take it away, Newcomb."

It took longer to polish the second group. Then, sighing inwardly, he gave Laddis, the second-string fullback, a rest and put in Mercer. Mercer was a rugged looking boy who betrayed his lack of confidence by the way he kept licking his lips and wiping sweaty palms on his thighs.

Strega hauled Forsi in to act as center, and said, "Okay, Mercer. Your assignment is to give the quarter protection as he fades. This play I'm a lineman coming through into your lap."

The ball was snapped. Strega pounded in, headed directly for Newcomb who had faded back. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Frank Mercer start a reluctant block. With his hand on Mercer's helmet, he drove the block down into the ground, levering himself around the prostrate fullback, leaping high to smack the pass off into the flat.

Mercer got up, flushing. "Boy, you didn't want to block me. You wanted to flinch off that block. When you flinch you could do better throwing feathers at me. I come in hard and your flinch slows you down, gives me a chance. This time you play the lineman coming through."

Mercer came in hard and fast. Strega drove at his thighs, sensing that Mercer went limp a split second before impact.

He got up, said, "You should be trying to run right through me, boy, not trying to ease the shock. Oh, skip it. Take a rest. Jabella come in. White, you come in for Brankoff."

On the sixty-series, White, as right half, had to block out the opposition end as the left half cut back toward the line to take the jump pass.

As they lined up, Julius White's thin face was eager, his eyes bright. "Damn it, White. Don't prance like that. You just waste energy. Get in position fast and get ready to move, but don't bounce around."

White nodded and tried to steady down, but his body was still filled with restless motion.

"Stanisk, you play the opposition end. And play wide. See if you can nail Sharma who's playing your position as the receiver?"

They lined up. Sharma came jogging over and Newcomb's fake was well done. Newcomb faded back with Jabella protecting him. Sharma cut back toward the line with White running outside him. Stanisk came in. White, too eager, outran Sharma, saw his error, slowed and tried to fall back against Stanisk. Stanisk, moving fast, bumped White eight feet away, got his hands on Sharma and pulled him down.

White got up, slightly groggy, shook his head a few times and grinned ruefully.

Strega said, "White, a little man's timing has to be perfect. Otherwise he takes a hell of a beating. You were off balance then. You're too tight. Try again."

The second time White moved well, slammed his body across Stanisk's knees and brought him down. Stanisk, wearing a mildly amused expression, got off White, helped him up.

STREGA yelled across the field to Chug. Chug brought the linemen over and from then on the practice was on a scrimmage basis, limited to the sixty-series, designed to make Greely sorry that Jackson had gotten a look at their ends.

When Tony Strega went home that evening Loren was amiable, polite and faintly distant. No mention was made of the

morning argument. He beat her at three straight games of cribbage and then they went to bed. Somehow there was a tiny wall between them. He could neither define it nor understand it. And it made him feel ineffectual.

Thursday he made the squad walk through every play in the book, not wishing to risk any minor injuries in scrimmage because of his lack of depth at all positions.

At dusk he called a halt and said, "Okay. Tomorrow we flip the ball around for an hour and call it a day."

He showered and dressed slowly. As he was lacing his shoes, the last few members of the squad left the dressing room. He was alone in the silence, in the glare of a naked bulb, in the smell of sweat and leather and alcohol. He wondered idly how much of his life had been spent in locker rooms. When the contract with the big school came along, he'd have a complete staff. There'd be no more climbing in and out of uniform. He'd wear tweeds and a topcoat and he'd stand with his hands in his topcoat pockets and watch four or five complete teams work out on a vast field.

When he saw something wrong there'd be a P.A. system with the mike handy so that he could holler out what he'd seen that he didn't like. The sports reporters would hang around for interviews and he'd always be pessimistic about his chances. That was good psychology.

He and Loren would have a big house and a bankroll and when he was interviewed on the radio or on television, she'd be waiting when he got home.

All the breaks. Every one. And gotten the hard way. Gotten by a tough little kid who had once been kicked in the face by a well-dressed drunk who didn't like the way his shoes had been shined. He remembered how he'd taken the shine box by the strap and slung it low, cracking the man's kneecap, leaving him yelling on the sidewalk

while the police whistle shrilled and the cop came running.

"Pardon me," the voice broke into his thoughts.

He glanced up quickly. He hadn't seen the man come in. The man was big, thick through the shoulders, wide through the middle. He stood with his legs braced and looked around the locker room.

"Better layout than we used to have," he said. He stuck out his hand. "I recognized you from your pictures, son. I'm Frank Mercer."

Tony stood up and took the man's hand. "Nice to meet you, sir," he said. He forced himself to smile amiably. The old squeeze play. Confidential request. *Let the boy play, son. Give him a chance, son.*

Frank Mercer exuded an air of confidence, money, security. He had heavy jowls, and a small gold football hung from his watch chain.

"Can I buy you a drink?" Mr. Mercer asked.

It was pointless to refuse. There was no need to antagonize the man any further than he'd be antagonized if he ferreted out the truth about his son.

"Sure thing. Let me phone first."

Mercer's long black sedan was outside. They went down into town, to the small men's bar in the basement of the big frame hotel.

They got their drinks at the bar and took them over to a table. As Tony was about to sit down, Mercer said, "Want to show you something. Over here."

The uniforms in the old pictures were laughable, as was the look of fearless determination on the faces. Mercer pointed to a mustached youth in the second row. "My father," he said. "And over here is his roommate, Julius White. About as big as a button. Practically the days of the flying wedge. There was a play where my dad picked up Julius and threw him bodily over the line. That was a great ground gainer."

Tony evidenced polite interest. Mercer led the way over to another picture, a much more modern picture.

"Me here," he said pointing. "Julius over there. The general procedure was for me to put my head down and slam the line. Julius used the holes I made—when I made 'em."

"It's still a good idea," Tony said, smiling.

They went back to the table. "Those two pictures are on the wall in my boy's room at home. He grew up on those pictures. Like a damn fool, I crammed them down his throat."

Striga looked up in surprise. There had been an elusive bitterness in Frank Mercer's tone.

MERCER said, "Tony—I hope you don't mind if I call you by your first name—I came here today to ask a funny favor. I stayed out of sight until my boy went back to the dorm. I don't want him to know that I've seen you."

Here it comes, Tony thought. The old pressure play.

"Tony, I don't know what your plans are, but I know you're a smart coach. I want Frank kept out of the Greely game."

Tony's mouth sagged open. "Huh?"

"I know you're surprised. I guess you thought that I was going to put the bee on you to have him play. I imagine they've been putting the arm on you about the old tradition. Maybe they've convinced you that you owe it to tradition to have Mercer and White in there for the Greely game. It won't work, Tony."

"Mr. Mercer, I don't quite get it."

Mercer sighed, waved for another drink. He said, "When he was born I had the stupid idea that he'd be the football flash. You know. Heredity. He was going to be the kind of star I wanted to be. When he was seven I had him out on the grounds running and passing and kicking the ball. He used to hate it. He wanted to

be up in his room with his books. He was that kind of a kid.

"Maybe if he resented me, it would be okay. But he likes me and he wants to please me. Like a fool, I twisted his life around so that now he's doing all this to please me. Tony, he hasn't got it. He just hasn't got the temperament for it. But he's been heading for next Saturday for the past twelve years. He's a quiet lad, a nice lad. But he's a scholar. He put meat and muscle on that frame of his through the bitterest kind of labor. And he feels that my respect for him depends on his showing Saturday."

Mercer leaned across the table and lowered his voice. "Tony, it's this simple. If you don't put him in, he can't blame himself. But I'm afraid of what will happen to the boy if you put him in and he flubs it, as I'm sure he will. I'm afraid of the guilt he'll feel."

Tony knew that some answer was expected of him. He lit a cigarette, inspected the glowing end for a few moments.

He said, "Mr. Mercer, I'm just a coach. I'm not a psychologist. I get a certain squad to work with. To tell you the truth, I'm hoping that I don't have to use your boy. I agree with you. He's got everything but the right mental attitude. I'm only three deep in his position. Jabella is first-string fullback. Laddis is next. Your boy is third. Jabella is in good shape. Laddis had an injury early in the season. He seems to be okay. He may not be. If Jabella is injured and if Laddis can't stand the pace, Mercer goes in. I can't help that. I can't go around knocking myself out over a lot of emotional stuff. Sure, they've been needling me about tradition. And I've been ignoring them. I have a squad and I'm expected to win games with it. So I'll use the squad any way I see fit. I'm not running a soul-saving organization. I'm just winning ball games."

Mercer smiled. "I had a hunch you'd be just like this, Strega."

His tone was mild but Tony was unaccountably reminded of Loren's criticism of his attitude.

"And if you see White's father, tell him the same thing."

Mercer stood up. "That's not very likely. White's father commanded an infantry regiment in the Pacific. A sniper got him." The coldness faded out of his voice. He said, "Tony, I'm sure you'll have a successful career as a coach. I just hope that you won't be too lonesome."

He tossed a bill on the table and left. Tony sat for several moments, sipping his drink, feeling the warm tide of anger slowly recede.

The dregs of his anger were still with him when he arrived home. Loren kissed him lightly, said, "Stop scowling, hon. Who brought on the mad?"

He considered. He didn't want to reopen the old argument. He forced a smile. "I just had a drink with an old alumnus. The usual guff. I'm not mad. Just a little weary."

GREELY'S band halted in the middle of the field, made a right face, finished their march, broke for their position across the field. The Greely team, looking big in pale-blue striped with white, broke out onto the field.

Strega smiled happily as he saw that they were running too fast, trying to be too impressive. He turned to Jackson and said, "Okay, you know what to look for." Jackson, injured early in the season, grinned and walked off, equipped with pad, paper, field glasses and small boy to carry the spotting notes. He was posted high in the end zone.

Tony turned and walked back toward the bench just as the Adams team came out. True to his instruction they ran easily, lifting knees just high enough to take out the kinks, faces impassive.

He liked the looks of his squad, but there was an uneasiness in the back of his

mind. Partly because he hadn't slept well; partly because Loren wasn't in the stands behind him.

She had said calmly, "Run along and be boss-man, hon. I hope you'll hatchet the opposition as usual for the sake of the shining record."

"There wouldn't be a touch of sarcasm there, Loren?"

Her eyes had widened. "My goodness, no! Sarcastic? Wouldn't I be wasting it?"

The two squads walked through a few plays, flipped the ball around and all but the two starting line-ups came off the field.

Jabella went over to match with Loots, the agile right half and captain of the Greely outfit. Strega thought, *With that Loots kid I could have had a perfect season. Next year I'll have one like him. Greely wastes him.*

Jabella won, elected to receive, and Loots picked the south goal to defend, taking advantage of a slight breeze. The day was clear and cold, but the ground was not frozen. All morning the cars had been arriving at Adams. The stands, built to hold twenty thousand, were packed for the first time that season.

Tony Strega sat on the bench, his hat brim low. Stanisk kicked. The ball went high, end over end. It was taken by Sheed, the Greely left half, on the six, barely caught before the Adams' ends, down fast under the kick, had him hemmed. Sheed started up the middle, flipped the ball back to Loots, but Maroney refused to be fooled, evaded Sheed's block, nailed Loots on the eleven.

Tony yanked the whole backfield, sent in Newcomb, Laddis, Sharma and Brankoff, along with two defensive linemen, a guard and an end.

Newcomb shifted Laddis well back to guard against a quick kick, shifted the defense to a six-three-one-one, guessed that Greely, pinned so close, would stay on the ground. Greely shifted to a single

wing, unbalanced line to the right, and tried to bull their way out of the box with a power sweep around right end.

Loots was knocked out of bounds on the far side of the field on the twelve.

Again they lined up in a single wing and Jeffer, the big fullback, cracked off tackle for four yards before Sharma and Brankoff stopped him.

Third and five. With a little more breathing space Greely moved into a T with Sheed as the man in motion. Garan, the tall thin quarterback took the pass from center, gave it on a hand-off to Sheed who in turn fed it to the big Jeffer on a shovel pass as Jeffer came booming down. Both Newcomb and Sharma had moved too far to the side when they saw Sheed take the hand-off, and when the hole was opened in the line and Jeffer came through, Newcomb spun and dived, but he was late and slow. A Greely end came around fast to take Laddis out of the play, but Laddis feinted him into taking his block too early, cut back and dropped Jeffer on the forty.

Across the field someone thumped the bass drum and the Greely fans went wild.

Tony Strega hunched his shoulders, smiled sourly and decided not to send in anybody to yelp at Newcomb. Newcomb was bright enough to see his own mistake.

On the next play Newcomb spread a wide six-two-two-one, smelled the play, cut back into the flat and batted the short pass out of the arms of the tail end who had climbed up after it.

Greely shifted back into single wing, unbalanced line to the left, and sent Loots around right end on a naked reverse. But the Greely guard missed the block on the Adams end and Loots was dropped before he got to the line of scrimmage. Third and eleven.

The next play started as a combination basketball game and backfield ballet. Maybe it would have gone somewhere. But Blessing, a tough defensive guard, submarined through, emerged in the Greely

backfield and slapped Garan, the quarterback, down in the middle of a fake.

Greely kicked and Sharma, taking Lad-dis' place as safety, picked it out of the air on a dead run and brought it all the way up to the twenty-eight before he was downed.

Tony sent Forsi, Jabella, Stanisk and Maroney back in, saying to Forsi, "Stay clear of the sixty series until I send you the word."

Forsi nodded tightly. The impressive results of a full season of intensive effort and training went onto the field in the form of the four backs.

TONY forced himself to draw a deep breath. Each man was an extension of himself. In a sense, the backfield was made up of four Tony Stregas.

There was no waste energy, no rushing around aimlessly, no fumbling or hesitation. Forsi called for a quick-opening play, stabbed at the left side of the line with Maroney. Maroney bucked through into the secondary, was trapped and downed as he tried to cut back.

Second and four. Tony knew what he would have called for. Get the first down. Al Forsi called it, giving a three-quarter spin and a hand-off to "Big Joe" Jabella, who carried the mail for a little over two yards, taking with him the whole center of the Greely line.

Third and less than two.

Forsi called the same play again, only Jabella plunged into the line without the ball, Forsi diving laterally through the hole that Jabella had made. The sticks were called out and the down was racked up. First and ten.

The boy shoved a folded piece of paper into Tony's hand. He opened it. "Still wide" it said.

"Farmer," he snapped. The lineman came over and crouched in front of him. "Go in for Blessing. Signal Forsi to run any sixty play."

First and ten. The ball was snapped. Forsi spun, faked a hand-off to Stanisk, faded back. Jabella slapped down a tackle who had oozed through the line. Stanisk made his cutback and the opposition end, seeing his danger, tried to close in fast. Maroney cut his legs out from under him as the rifed pass thudded snugly against Stanisk's chest. In the secondary, he cut wide, picked up the interference, pounded down the sidelines, cut back, was dumped on the Greely thirty. The ball squirted out of his arms and a Greely player fell on it. There was shocked silence from the Adams stands, a yell of glee from the Greely side of the field.

Tony Strega muttered curses deep in his throat.

Greely, taking advantage of their gift from nowhere, bucked, plunged and elbowed their way into two first downs that carried them just over the mid-field stripe before they were forced to kick. The kick, angled toward the sidelines, went out at the fourteen.

Forsi took over again, sharp mind clicking, using the judgment that Tony Strega had beaten into him.

Maroney around left end for three. Jabella off tackle for four. A pass into the flat for five. A sneak for three more. End around for six. Jump pass to the end in the flat for seven. Jabella through the middle for two, then three, then eight.

A precision march. And the deeper the march went, the tougher it got. Tony watched the ends, and he knew that Forsi watched them also.

Down to the Greely forty-eight. Forty-four. Thirty-eight. Thirty-seven. Thirty-one. Twenty-six.

Each thrust forward into the heart of Greely-land enabled the defense to concentrate their forces.

On a long-delayed buck where a hole opened, was closed, and opened again in the nick of time, Maroney carried it on down to the twenty.

Forsi fed a jump pass to the left end at the line of scrimmage. The end flipped it laterally out to Stanisk who, with Jabella running interference, plunged it on down to the twelve as the quarter ended.

First and ten on the twelve. With some beautiful faking, Forsi shook Stanisk loose again. Stanisk was downed on the three, but the horn had blown on the play. Adams had drawn the offside penalty and it was first and fifteen.

First and fifteen. A pass into the end zone was incomplete. A second try at the end around was nailed at the line of scrimmage. Third and fifteen. Tony Strega tensed as he saw the left end wide.

Once again the same play. The end was swept out of the play, the guard was blocked in toward the center of the line and Stanisk was dropped on the two.

Jabella, crashing into the entire center of the Greely line, made it a first down by inches.

Jabella tried twice more for no gain. Third and goal to go. Forsi faded back, evaded a tackler, ducked away from another, moved on back to the ten, the fifteen. There he was nearly trapped. Maroney was running at full speed laterally along the end zone. He moved in front of the man covering him. Forsi got the pass off. It was too far ahead of Maroney. Maroney made a flat dive, gathered in the ball at shoe-top level and the big six was racked up. The kick was good and the Adams band blared the touchdown march as the tired team drifted back into position to kick.

Greely took the ball on the ten and, in four successive downs, brought it up beyond mid-field before a fumble lost them twelve yards and they were forced then to kick.

Forsi gnawed out two first downs before kicking. Greely had it back up to mid-field and the half ended as a long, tower-

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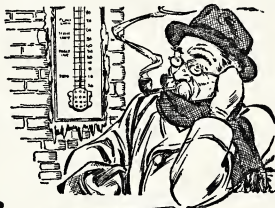
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ing pass was knocked down by Brankoff in the end zone.

Andy Fels, the trainer, was prodding Stanisk's shoulder as Tony came into the locker room. Men were stretched out on the benches, chests heaving.

"Anybody hurt?" Tony asked.

"Nothing serious, Mr. Strega," Andy said.

Tony walked slowly through the long low room. He cuffed Forsi on the chest and winked at him. They seemed in fair shape. Weary, but still confident.

CHAPTER THREE

Touchdown Castouts

BACK in the center of the room he said, "Nice going, guys. We got one. We might have had two. Sims is over there with them giving them hell. They'll come out after blood. It'll be tough holding them off. But I think we can do it. Play it smart and hard and fast. Do your jobs. Remember your assignment. Keep your heads up. They'll be eager enough to bobble a few. Fall on the ball. This is the last game. With a win we've got a good season. A loss and we're all dogs. A good season and we get the breaks next year. You know what I mean."

He turned toward the door, found his way unexpectedly blocked by Frank Mercer. Mercer, uncertain and ill at ease, said, "Coach, I—"

"Speak up, boy."

"I wondered if I was going to get in this game. You see I—"

Strega smiled. It wasn't a very friendly smile. "I know, kid. The history books say this is your day to be a hero. You talk to Forsi. You ask him to punch another one or two across and I'll shove you in for the closing moments."

Mercer drifted away, his eyes hurt, his lips tight. Tony Strega left and slammed the door after him.

The first ten minutes of the third quarter turned into a kicking duel, with the educated toe of Greely's Jeffer providing a slight advantage.

Each team, hot after the ball, smothered the defensive efforts of the other team. Tony, trying to weigh the remaining strength of his men, glanced along the bench. Everybody had been in but Mercer, White and two tackles. Tony sent in the two tackles.

At last Jeffer hit the jackpot with a kick which took an odd bounce, went over the safety man's head and rolled out inches from the goal line.

The kick by Adams was bad, barely reaching the mid-field stripe. Greely got down to the forty where it became fourth and three. Jeffer kicked magnificently, and the hankerchief was dropped on the two.

Loots went back as safety.

Stanisk got off a beautiful kick, his best of the day. It sailed, wide and handsome, way back over Loots' head. Loots raced back, picked it up on his own twenty-five, spun away from a driving tackle, angled toward the sidelines. Two men closed in on him. He sidestepped the shot of one, broke through the other with a punishing straight arm. He toe-danced down the sideline until he was blocked. He cut back but he had picked up protection. He moved nicely in back of his interference, racing down the cluttered field. He spun out of another tackle, reversed his field, made it down to the thirty. Sharma and Maroney closed in on him. Sharma was blocked out. Loots feinted but he couldn't fake Maroney off line. Loots put on a burst of speed and ran Maroney down. It caught Maroney by surprise. He managed to trip Loots. But Loots, after stumbling wildly, managed to stay on his feet.

In the end zone he slowed, stopped, and burlesqued the heaving of a huge sigh.

They tried hard to block the kick, but fingers failed to reach the ball and it sailed through, straight and true.

With the score tied, the quarter ended just as Adams ran the first play from the twenty for a three yard gain, second and seven.

After the first play in the fourth quarter, Maroney tried to hobble back to position. Time was called and he came off, limping badly. It was the first serious loss. Some men had been badly enough bruised to need a rest and several had had the wind knocked out of them, necessitating a time out, but this was the first man out of the game for keeps.

Mercer helped Maroney back to the locker room where his ankle could be tended.

Brankoff was almost as good as Maroney. Just a shade slower on his feet and quite a bit slower in the head. Forsi, with Brankoff in the right-half slot, would have to skim off and discard the top precision layer from the bag of tricks.

Tony wondered if Loren understood his predicament, and then he realized with a deep and heavy sense of loss that she wasn't there.

Forsi had to slam ahead for the winning points. Jackson sent down a report that one of the Greely guards was too eager and might fall for the old mouse trap.

Tony sent a tackle in with the information. Forsi slammed Jabella through the hole where the too-eager guard had been. Jabella made eleven yards, running the last three with tacklers hanging all over him.

Brankoff fumbled and suddenly it was third down, eleven to go. Greely drew a roughing-the-kicker penalty. And so the kick wasn't necessary.

It was that close. Almost inch by inch. A gamble all the way. Tired men snapped into position, lifting sodden legs for that last ounce of energy, that last bit of drive. This was the pay-off and Forsi was in there, throwing his dwindling forces in the best direction, subject only to occasional suggestion from the bench.

DOWN to the forty, to mid-field, to the Greely forty. Fourth and one on the Greely thirty-five. A desperate gamble that paid off a first down. Down to the thirty, the twenty, the fifteen. Down to the ten and Greely stands rocked with the chant of, "Hold that line!"

Jabella got up more slowly each time. Down to the eight, the five. The three.

And Greely got possession of the ball on downs on their own two yard line.

Tony glanced at the clock. Seven minutes to play.

A Greely team, revitalized by the way they had halted the Adams drive, snapped back and shook Loots loose for forty yards. The next play, a long pass, hauled down by a Greely end, made it a first down on the Adams twenty.

Tony Strega tasted the sourness of defeat. On the next play, Loots went wide, his chunky legs churning, knees high, his speed deceptive.

A man arrowed out of the back and a blocker missed, Brankoff, moving faster than he had moved at any time during the afternoon, hit Loots head on. The ball bounded away. Forsi was there to fall on it.

Loots got up slowly. Brankoff didn't get up at all.

During the time out they got him on his feet. But he didn't know what day it was and he didn't have any idea who they were playing. He came off the field meekly.

"White for Brankoff!" Tony said, his voice cracking like a whip.

Julius White gave Tony a startled look and sped out. There was no other solution. Julius White was the only right half left. It was just hard luck that his injuries had to be both in the right-half slot. And harder luck that he had such a small squad that he couldn't afford any all-purpose backs who could fill any slot in an emergency.

Halfway to the referee, Julius White, running far too fast, fell over his own feet, fell heavily.

Tony stifled a groan. Julius got up, ran out more slowly and reported.

Five minutes to play.

Five minutes for Forsi to try to exact the impossible from a weary squad. They lined up and Forsi, in the huddle, had called a play from the sixty series.

Once again the fade-back, the jump pass, only this time with Stanisk and White cutting outside the end, White taking the pass, Stanisk blocking. Stanisk nailed his man. White avoided a tackler, ran wide, cut back too sharply. His cleats cut the turf and he went down without a man near him. The play had netted six, but it could have been sixteen.

The rising yell of the Adams stands dwindled off into a moan.

They lined up again and Julius White was prancing in position like a skittish colt. Stanisk took the flip from Forsi, faded back to pass with White and a guard who had pulled out of the line to cover him.

White, not content to drift back and wait for the shot, ran down to the line of scrimmage to block a man who looked like he was coming through. A line-backer and an end stormed back toward Stanisk. The guard got the end, but the line-backer went high and tipped the pass almost straight up. A Greely man made a dive for it and recovered it after it had hit the ground, but it was ruled incomplete.

Third and four.

Tony looked along the bench. Frank Mercer was shifting uneasily, his head sunk between his shoulders. He caught Tony's glance and his eyes widened as he pointed a finger at his own chest. Tony saw the boy's lips form a word.

"Me?"

He pursed his lips and shook his head from side to side.

ON THE next play the pass from center was bad. Forsi had to reach high for it. He didn't have time to pull it down, spin and feed it to Stanisk,

but was forced to hang on, continue his spin all the way around, and try his own shot at the line. He was bounced back for a yard loss.

Fourth and five.

The kick went deep and the ends were down to smother Loots on the fifteen.

Three minutes.

Some of the crowd began to chant for Mercer and White. Tony turned in his seat and gave the crowd an angry glare. Often, when looking at a vast crowd of people, the eye will catch a certain individual. His heart gave a surprising and totally unexpected lurch as he saw Loren, her red hat perched at a jaunty angle, her lips unsmiling.

He looked at her for several seconds. He was certain that she looked at him and looked away. When he turned back he gasped. Then he shouted angrily. Mercer ignored him.

Mercer was racing in to report. And without authority.

His angry shout had focused the eyes of the other men on the bench who, up until that moment, had believed that Strega had given Frank Mercer some sort of signal to go in.

His fists clenched, Tony stood up, saw Mercer report, saw Jabella jog tiredly off the field.

Tony turned to Laddis. "Get ready to go in after one play."

On a hunch he turned, found Loren again. She was looking at him and she was smiling. She touched her fingertips to her lips. Tony Strega sat down heavily.

Laddis warmed up along the sidelines.

The game was gone, and the backfield was shot, and his two clowns were in there. He spat onto the dirt at his feet and hunched over, elbows on his knees. He wanted to strike out at the fate which had robbed him of this win. And he had a hunch that Greely would shake Loots loose again.

Jeffer found a hole on the first play

that Greely ran. He loomed up in the backfield. Stanisk missed a shot. Little White bounced off Jeffer's meaty thighs. Forsi was too far to one side. Frank Mercer had a half-hearted shot at Jeffer. By pure luck his forearm clipped Jeffers across the ankle. Jeffer went down hard.

But it was an eight yard gain right through the middle.

Tony turned to send Laddis in and then he thought. *The hell with it. I'll leave Mercer in for a few more plays. Let Loren see what it does to him. Let it teach her something.*

On the next play Loots, on the receiving end of a shovel pass, scooted out into the clear. Julius White angled toward him, dived, got him by one angle and dumped him. But it was a first down for Greely.

Two minutes left in the game.

Mercer and White walked side by side back toward the backfield. Forsi was calling the defensive shifts. White was saying something to Mercer.

On the next play, Jeffer drove hard at the center of the line. Before he got there, the Greely line opened a hole big enough to take a launch through.

Mercer came toward the hole just as fast from one direction as Jeffer came from the other. Tony's jaw sagged open as the thud of their sudden meeting echoed all the way back to the bench.

As far as he had been able to see, Frank Mercer had tried hard to break Jeffer into several small pieces.

Second and twelve.

Forsi went high and slapped down a pass.

On the next play Loots tried a hard slant off tackle, but Mercer, his sleeve ripped from wrist to elbow, rose up out of nowhere, gathered Loots up and hurled him back into his own backfield.

Forsi put White and Stanisk back in the safety slot. A minute and thirty seconds. The kick came high, giving the ends time to come down. Stanisk took it, ran dead

ahead, flipped it over to White. White tucked it under his left arm, reversed his field brilliantly, angled toward the sidelines, cut back upfield, brought it all the way up to the forty.

Forsi called the play fast.

He fed it to Mercer. Mercer went through the middle on a hard plunge that gained four yards. Stanisk, with Mercer running interference, went around end for three more. Forsi tried a long pass. No dice.

Fourth and three.

Forsi dropped back, rifled one into White's arms. Mercer was trying to keep ahead of White. But White passed him as Tony Strega groaned. White, apparently blind, ran directly into the arms of two tacklers.

But as he hit the tacklers he twisted and with a totally unexpected toss, he hung the ball dead in front of Mercer.

Mercer took it on the Greely forty. Stanisk managed to knife ahead of him in a desperate block that cut down an immediate threat.

Mercer ran like a bull. He ran with his feet wide, his knees high, all thrusting power. The fleet Loots caught him at the ten. Mercer rocked under the impact, staggered to one side, tore one leg free and with Loots hanging on the other leg he took three more hitching steps. Another man hit him from the side and Mercer fell, but he fell with his face on the goal line, the ball extended ahead of him at arm's length.

ANTHONY STREGA sat in his small darkened living room, slouched in the chair, his legs straight out, his heels against the carpet. Loren sat on the floor, her cheek against his thigh, his fingers wound in her raven hair.

He said softly, "After the gun, after the mob headed for the goal posts, I saw White drop as though he'd been shot. They had to carry him into the dressing room.

I couldn't figure it. My two weak sisters had pulled my game out of the fire.

"By the time I fought clear of the mob and got in there, he'd come to. Andy called me over and told me to look at the kid's hand. It looked more like a foot. As near as we can tell there were three bones broken in that hand.

"The boys were shocked at the way we'd stolen the game. They were just beginning to fill the place with yells. Al Forsi came up to me, grinning and shaking his head. He said, 'Coach, that big crazy Mercer was charging all over the place blubbering every minute and the tears were running down his face. It beats the hell out of me.'

"Mercer was over in the corner, too weary to unlace his shoes. He grinned up at me and the tears had made dirty marks on his face. He said, 'Coach, we had to keep those history books accurate.'

"Loren, right then something hit me—something about those crazy, wonderful kids got me by the throat. In another minute I'd have been blubbering like Mercer had been.

"White was getting over his green look and a doc was on the way. He came over. I asked him what the hell happened in there and he grinned at me a little weakly, and said that he saw Frank flinch off a tackle, so when he got a chance he showed Frank his hand and said that if Mercer missed another shot like that, he was going to walk up to him and pop him right in the face with the busted hand, and did Mercer expect him to play all by himself and what good was a lot of meat and muscle if you were afraid to use it.

"I guess Mercer thought White was going to ruin the hand for keeps. Forsi didn't know a thing about it or he'd have sent White out. White started to kid Mercer about one for the records and how this was his chance to make Ripley's column.

"That explained some things. It explained why White toted the ball in his

left arm and why that heave to Mercer, which wasn't in the books, had to be done with the left hand.

"But here was the pay-off, baby. I asked White which play busted his hand. He turned bright red and allowed as how he'd fallen on it on the way out to report."

She said, "I changed my mind and came to see the game. A hunch or something. I spent a lot of the afternoon just walking, and thinking about us."

"What about us?"

"I don't think I have to say it now."

He was silent for a time and then he muttered, "Those crazy, wonderful kids."

"You had them all taped, darling. All figured down to the T. No pun intended."

"Maybe some things can't be figured."

"Darling?"

"What is it, Loren?"

"Darling, how much is two and two?"

The question shocked him, and suddenly he realized how far he had gone in one day. He knew that never again would things be exactly the same in his mind, and that he was being forced to sacrifice a portion of that drive which had given him his courage and his strength, but in sacrificing it he was gaining something else, which, in its own way was precious and necessary. He felt the collapse of certain values and yet he knew that the void they left would become filled with a warmth he had never known.

"Two and two is usually four, Loren," he said softly. "Or five, or six or seven."

She sighed, a small and sleepy sound. "You know, Mr. Strega, this may turn out to be a pretty satisfactory marriage if I give it enough time."

"Even if we don't edge into the big dough?"

"Even if we stay right here and get all stupefied with tradition and stuff and never leave."

Anthony Strega smiled in the darkness. "I don't know why that should sound good. But in some funny way it does."



JEFFRIES, THE MIGHTY



ON JUNE 9, 1899, Jim Jeffries knocked out Bob Fitzsimmons in the eleventh round of their bout at Coney Island, N. Y., to become the fourth heavyweight champion of the world. The fight was a thrilling one but to both contestants it was a mere formality, for each secretly knew before it began how it would end.

There was nothing crooked or out of order about this fight; still, before it began Jeffries had advance "knowledge" that he would win. So Fitzsimmons believed, too, but his advance "information" was even more specific, telling him that he would take a bad beating for ten rounds and then be knocked out. The answer to this riddle is that both men were intensely superstitious; both were willing to put their trust in omens.

Two days before the fight Jeffries was winding up training at Asbury Park, N. J., by taking a last bit of roadwork with his sparring partner, Tommy Ryan. The caveman-like Jeffries had been moody and anxious about the coming bout for days. As he trotted, his foot kicked a penny in the mud in front of him. He stopped and stared where the penny fell back into the mud with fear in his eyes. He turned to Ryan and said with absolute certainty, "If that penny is heads I'll surely beat Fitz. It it's tails I'm a goner. Pick it up, Tommy!"

Ryan looked at the penny barely visible through the mud and said, "Leave it lay there."

As if hypnotized Jeffries kneeled and put his fingers in the slime and gently lifted out the copper cent. He straightened out his bent knees and slowly rose, brushing dirt off the copper. For a moment he just stared unbelievably and then let out a wild whoop. Ryan looked at the copper Indian in Jeffries' palm and let out his breath in relief.

The next night, miles away, a confident and finely trained Bob Fitzsimmons went to bed at nine o'clock. It was the night before his defense of the championship and he wanted to be well rested. He woke up the next morning haggard and morose. "Rose!" he cried at his wife. "It's all over! I'm going to lose the championship!"

Shocked by the intensity of his declaration she asked how he knew.

"I dreamt I was in a battle," said the frightened Cornishman, "a very tough battle, and I was knocked out. You know dreams never lie!"

His wife, now thoroughly worried about his mental attitude towards a fight only a few hours away in which a championship worth a million dollars was at stake, tried first to laugh away his fears and then bitterly to ridicule them. But the more she laughed and pleaded the more stubborn Fitz became. "The fight was so vividly portrayed you can't make me believe it wasn't so," he said morbidly.

With both men convinced the fight would end in a decisive Jeffries victory, it could hardly have ended otherwise.

—Shippy Adelman



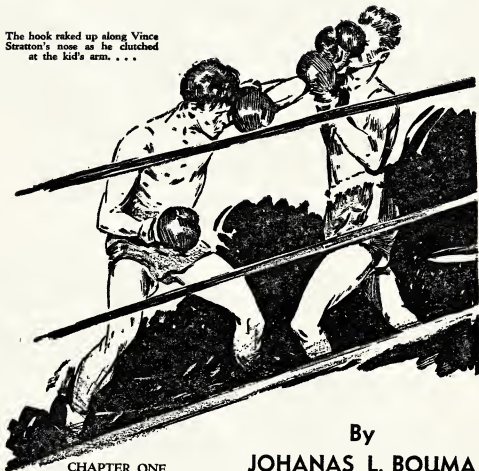
PUSH-'EM-UP GUY

THE most thrilling of all Indianapolis Speedway finishes took place in 1912. Ralph De Palma, the popular idol and favorite to win the classic hands down, had a tremendous lead over the field when his car unexpectedly broke down so near the finish line that rather than wait for repairs he jumped from behind the wheel, put his shoulder to the back of his racer—and pushed it across the line. His victory wasn't allowed, however, since the judges declared that cars must finish under their own power!

—David C. Cooke

NO COUNT KID

The hook raked up along Vince Stratton's nose as he clutched at the kid's arm. . . .



CHAPTER ONE

Fistic Fury

By
JOHANAS L. BOUMA

THE first time I saw this kid work was in Leon Abbit's gym in L.A.

He was a welter a little tall for the weight, but lean in the flanks and with good shoulders. There was a heavy working with him, but the kid jabbed him so

he didn't have a chance to get set. I never saw an arm move so fast. Nothing but blur. The kid pistoned a right hook inside and moved around with the confidence of a cat. He stepped in again before the big guy knew what the score was, fed three

"When you've got a gun in each hand an' a head like a rock, you can afford to be wrong on every count—except the last one—the one they count over you!"

A
Novel



fast lefts to the midsection, and exploded a straight right that draped the heavy against the ropes.

Something turned over inside me. This was it. This was the best I'd seen during twenty years as a trainer. As far as I was concerned he was my boy.

"How do you like him?" a voice said, and I turned and looked at Leon Abbit.

We hadn't seen each other for five years, but you'd never guess it. Abbit doesn't believe in showing his feelings. He's a poker-faced character who makes money running his gym and managing his fighters. But he's straight as they come. Abbit's all right.

I glanced back at the ring. "He looks good."

"Keep watching," Abbit said.

The kid was still going after the heavy, not letting up. He moved like silk under a clumsy swing. His left and right came up beneath the heavy's chin. The big guy sat down, a silly grin on his face. And then I looked at the kid.

His sides were heaving like bellows. He was in a half-crouch almost directly over the heavy. His skin glowed pink, but his face was carved ivory. His eyes were black, glaring sockets, and he looked like some kind of animal right out of the jungle.

"Enough for today," Abbit called out.

The kid straightened and knuckled a glove through his blue-black hair. He crawled out of the ring without speaking or even offering to help the heavy to his feet.

"See what I mean?" Abbit said.

I saw, all right. There are many kinds of fighters, and just as many reasons why they turn to the game. There are those who drift into it with the idea of an easy buck. That wasn't the kid. Maybe half turn to fighting because they love it. That wasn't the kid, either. A few smart guys figure their chances beforehand, guys like Tunney. Some of them reach the top. The kid wasn't in that crowd. But there are a few—and it's rarely one ever ends up in the money—who fight because of a frustration. It can be anything. Maybe because they had a bad time when they were youngsters. Maybe their old man or some school bully beat them. Maybe they never had a chance at anything, or their inferiority complex is such that they have to

prove to themselves as well as to other people that they're as good as any human alive.

It's like a drug. They carry a chip on their shoulders and dare you to touch it. And the reason they never get anywhere is that they spend most of their energy fighting themselves.

That was the kid.

"Where'd you find him?" I asked.

"He came in a little over a year ago, wanting to fight. I gave him a chance and he earned two quick knockouts, so I signed him to a year's contract. It runs out in two months," Abbit added.

"Cure him," I said.

Abbit just looked at me.

"I mean it," I said. "All my life—" And then I stopped. The way Abbit kept looking at me was a reminder of the clippings in my hotel room. "Okay," I said. "Forget it."

"How are things in the East?" Abbit asked.

"Going all right. But I quit, Abbit. Twenty years. It's about time."

"Then what are you doing here?" he wanted to know.

"Well, I—" I grinned. "I've been here two months. I've seen Hollywood and Santa Monica and all of this pushed-out city. Got restless. You know? Kind of missed the old smells and watching the boys take their workouts."

Abbit grunted. After a while he said, "Want a job?"

I knew in my heart that this was the only reason I had come here. Put an old sailor on land and what have you got?

"Why, Abbit," I said slowly, "I don't know if—"

"Run it down the drain," Abbit said. "I need a trainer. You got a job. You couldn't quit any more than you could stop reading the sports pages."

And that's how Mike Mariano—yours truly—went back to work two months after he retired.

ALL the rest of the day I kept thinking about the kid, so the next morning I got to Abbit's office early and looked over the records. His name was Joe Hearn. He'd had a dozen or so fights since signing with Abbit, winning half of them by knockouts, mostly in the early rounds. He'd lost the rest the same way.

I felt something about this kid, and my being a trainer had nothing to do with it, either. I had to help him, but I didn't know how to go about it because I hadn't been able, at the right time, to help myself.

Abbit came in around nine. He said, "I'm fighting two boys in Torrent City tomorrow night. Here are the bums they're fighting." He handed me a slip of paper. "Know 'em?"

"This Bob Tucker," I said, "he's a welter. He was a hot Golden Glover who turned pro. I saw him go in Jersey six months ago. A boxer, but nothing else to speak of."

"Hearn fights him," Abbit said. "The outcome depends on how his temper holds out."

"Maybe he can put the clamps on it," I said.

Understand, working with that big dumb heavy like the kid was yesterday, is not the same as climbing through the ropes for a purse. It's strictly business in there, and the guys fighting are matched

according to their records. But my kid had it all over this Tucker. He could beat this other boy if he kept his mind on the fighting.

You understand how it is? A guy with not much on the ball can beat a better man if that better man goes wild. He can box and keep moving around until the other man wears himself out. Then he steps in and it's all over. There was the reason my kid had lost half of his fights.

Abbit said, "You'll take the boys in tonight. I'm driving to San Diego this afternoon to line up some future fights."

After Abbit left, I went down to the gym. There were half a dozen boys working out. The kid was going after the heavy bag. He had his head against it and was punching away with both hands. He was taking it out on that bag for no reason at all.

I came up behind him. "Hearn," I said.

He didn't hear me. This kid was smacking that bag with everything he had, but his mind was on himself instead of on what he was doing.

I tapped his sweating shoulder and he turned on me like a flash. You should have seen the look on that kid's face! His mouth was pulled tight, and the skin around his glaring black eyes trembled. "What do you want?" he snarled, and it came out a challenge.

"Take it easy," I said. "I'm Mike Mariano, the new trainer around here."

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"So what?" He moved around and went back to pounding the bag.

There was my answer. Most youngsters have respect for a trainer. This kid, no. I was his enemy. Everybody was his enemy. This kid was being persecuted, or so he thought. Well, I knew how he felt, but I had to get started, and I couldn't do it if I let him get away with that crack.

"That's enough on the heavy bag," I said. "You're fighting tomorrow night. Take a rubdown and a shower and then come to the office. I want to talk to you."

He didn't even look up, just kept pounding away.

All right. I walked to the dressing room and found trunks and shoes in a locker. I'm forty-two, but I still have my hair and all my teeth. I've kept in shape, no smoking or drinking, and I strip down to a trim one-fifty. I donned the togs, had one of the boys fix me up with the pil-lows, and returned to the gym.

The kid was still working on the bag. He was breathing in gusts. He was tired. I tapped his shoulder and he gave me that same quick animal look. I pointed a glove at the ring.

He looked at me for the barest second. His chest pumped with the effort of his breathing. Then he went past me and through the ropes.

"Three two-minute rounds," I told the timekeeper. That's all I was good for, and I knew it. The rest of the boys were watching, drifting toward the ring. I put my gloves on the ropes and looked at them.

"You come here to train or watch other guys work out?" I said. "Get back to work."

THEY went back and I turned around at the bell. The kid came across the canvas in a buffalo charge. I moved at top speed to keep away from him, only throwing a punch

when it was a sure thing. For three rounds we would be a near match. He was worn down. I was an old man even if I didn't look it. I kept him running. I led him around that ring in the fastest chase he ever had. Just before the round ended he threw a looping left that I managed to duck. I stepped inside and arrowed a right cross to the side of his jaw. It was a good solid blow and stopped him. Then the bell sounded. I followed him to the corner.

"You're not in there to kill me," I said. "You're in there to learn. And quit fighting yourself."

A horrible look of frustration went across his face. I had socked him hard without laying a glove on him, and I knew it.

"What do you mean?" he said.

That was part of it. Hiding it from everyone but himself. Living his life upstairs and keeping it locked up in there, and outsiders not welcome because he wasn't sure of himself.

"You know what I mean," I said, "and don't give me a song and dance. You think I'm in here with you to show you up. You're wrong. I'm doing it to teach you that in this gym I'm your boss, and don't ever forget it."

I went back to my corner and waited for the bell. I turned with it and waited for the kid's charge. It came, but not with its early ferocity. I moved around and tapped him with a left. He brushed it, shooting his own left with the speed of a striking snake. It caught me high on the side of the head, and even with the pillows I felt its power. I backed away and he moved after me, faked a looping right and then shot it straight from the shoulder.

Did you ever run into a wall? That was the way this punch shook me. Not just where it landed, but all over. I went over backwards and rolled on my side. Then I lifted my face and saw the kid not two feet away. I sat up.

CHAPTER TWO

Big Punch Welter

"Didn't anyone ever tell you about a neutral corner?" I barked at him.

He hesitated a little before backing up. When he got where he was supposed to be, I climbed to my feet and waved him back in. That was a futile gesture. He came in wild. I jabbed him and tied him up, jabbed him and tied him up. By the end of the round he was worn to a frazzle.

"That's all," I told him. "The rubdown and the shower and the office. Just like I told you before."

"You told the timekeeper three rounds," he panted.

"My business," I said. "You do like I tell you."

He went through the ropes without another word, and I followed. We didn't speak in the shower room. I dressed and went to the office, and he was right behind me. I sat down, told him to take a seat. He didn't. He said, "Why do you want to see me? Abbit's dropping my contract. He doesn't want me around. Why are you fooling with me?"

"Because you're as good a welter as I've seen. Good enough to go to the top if you're willing to learn."

"You see my record?"

"I don't have to see your record. Now listen to me about this Tucker you're fighting tomorrow night. He's a clean hitter with no punch. He's a nice guy trying to get somewhere on a Golden Glove's reputation. He won't, not ever. I want you to go after him, and I want you to know every second what you're doing. Nothing but to win that fight on your mind, understand? He hasn't got it in for you. He's just trying to get somewhere."

"I don't like you saying that," he said. He pounded the desk. "I don't like you telling me I don't know what I'm doing. I can't stand it having guys throw their hooks into me, and I don't have to stand for it."

I LOOKED at him. What was inside of this kid was written all over his face. "Look," I said, "you can quit. I'll fix it about the fight or any other fight before your contract runs out. But will that fix it, Joe? Anywhere you go you've got to take orders. Everybody's got to take orders. And people are not trying to throw the hooks into you when they give them."

"Mike," he said, and it was the first time he called me by my name. "Mike, I'll fight this guy right."

"Fine," I said. "A light workout in the morning. Nothing in the afternoon. We leave here around seven."

The other boy I had with me, a middle-weight, won the opener. Joe and Tucker had their four-rounder ahead of the semi. This Torrent City arena was a big barn of a place, but it drew a good crowd. I was in the ring with the kid, and we looked around as Tucker came up the steps. He was a nice-looking boy who turned just before he came through the ropes to wave at a couple at ringside.

I slipped down at the buzzer and pulled the stool as the bell sounded. My kid went out there with that frozen look on his face and met Tucker three-quarters of the way across the canvas. He didn't give Tucker a chance to spar. He went in there, his shoulders shifting a little, hooked a left to Tucker's body and his right right behind it. Tucker's mouth came open and his guard down. The kid brought the right upstairs and it was all shoulder, and didn't travel more than six inches. That was it. For a second the kid hesitated, and the referee had to wave him back before the count. When it was over I jumped up the steps and grabbed the kid. "Next time you knock a guy out help him to his feet."

"Why should I?" he said, and pulled the robe across his shoulders.

"A lesson in humility," I said.

I got him to the dressing room and under the shower. I hadn't been wrong. This kid had it. He was good enough to go to the top and go there fast. He had the instinct, he was fast, and he could hit. But if he ever got in the ring with one of those bums who like to mutter insults, he was finished. It worried me.

We went out to the car and drove back to the city without saying much. I guess we felt pretty good. Both of the boys had won, and I was planning for the kid.

About halfway to the city I saw a hamburger joint up ahead and I pulled in. "You guys want coffee and burgers?" I asked. They did, so we went inside.

We sat at the counter, eating burgers and sipping from steaming mugs. The doors opened, and in the mirror back of the counter I recognized Tucker and the couple he'd waved to before entering the ring. One was a girl, blonde, shapely. The other, a man, was below average height, with a square, good-looking face and sleek black hair. Vince Stratton, by name. Tough, shoulders to throw a punch, legs good enough at thirty to take him out of danger. A hard worker in the ring, he was crowding the top of the welterweight division.

Tucker saw us at once and he came over. He slapped a hand on the kid's shoulder. He said, "Where've you been hiding, and what are you doing fighting guys like myself?"

No rancor, just being friendly. The kid looked at him once and went back to his burger.

Tucker grinned at me and we shook hands, and then he spoke to my other boy. A nice guy, this Tucker. He said, "I'd like you guys to come over and meet Vince and my sister." Then he put his hand on the kid's shoulder again. "There's a guy you should meet in the ring."

"Maybe I will," the kid said, moving his shoulder so Tucker's hand dropped away.

"He kind of took me under his wing when I won the Golden Gloves," Tucker said, not seeming to notice the kid's move. "You'll like him. Come over when you've finished."

He left us and went to where the girl and Stratton had taken a booth. My other boy finished his coffee and walked over to the record machine.

The kid looked at me. There was misery on his face. "We got to meet them?"

"Why not?" I said.

"I'm no good with people," the kid blurted out. "I can't talk."

I got up. "It's all in your head," I told him. "You quit thinking about yourself. Tucker was nice enough to ask. You want to insult him by not going over?"

"No," the kid said, "but I hate it. I wish he hadn't asked."

"Don't go, then. Nobody says you have to go."

I dipped my head at my other boy and walked with him to the booth, but when we reached there the kid was right behind us.

Tucker made with the introductions. His sister's name was Laura. She was glad to meet us and she showed it. The kid and her shook hands, and she looked at their hands together and then back at the kid. She was a handsome girl with blue eyes and skin like cream. "Something tells me we'll be reading about you in the newspapers before very long," she said.

The kid jerked his hand away and swallowed anything he'd meant to say. He nodded curtly at Vince Stratton and moved back a step.

Stratton looked at me, and I knew without him saying anything that he had the kid pegged. He gave me a funny smile. "He reminds me of a welter who fought

twenty years ago. Doesn't he you, Mike?"

"He's better," I said. "He could've taken that guy to the cleaners."

"That's not the way I heard it."

The girl gave us a curious look. "What on earth are you talking about?"

Stratton smiled at her. "Just recalling an old-timer in the game, honey. Weren't we, Mike?"

"That's right," I said.

He couldn't burn me, and I guess he knew it. The kid was something else, and he knew that, too. Stratton was near the top because he fought his way up there. It hadn't been easy, but he'd stuck with it for seven years, learning his trade and improving each year. Now he'd seen the kid fight, and it gave him something to think about. And something else. Having Tucker under his wing was because of the girl, and no other reason. He knew Tucker wasn't any good as a fighter.

Driving into the city, the kid says, "Who's the welter Stratton said I reminded him of?"

"Some punk who used to think he was pretty good," I said, and felt the kid stiffen. I laughed. "Don't get excited. This guy really was pretty good."

"But I could have beat him, eh?"

FOR a minute I didn't say anything. Then I said, "Yeah, kid, I guess you could have."

We dropped my other boy off at his

boarding house and drove the two blocks to the kid's place. He was grinning when he climbed out, feeling good. "I like Tucker," he said. "He's a nice guy. I like his sister, too."

"Don't let it interfere with your sleep," I said. "You're gonna work hard from now on."

During the next few days I found out there wasn't much I could teach the kid. He was a natural, and if there was anything he needed it was experience. Once each day I had him in the ring with a fast lightweight, a dazzler, who couldn't have knocked an old lady off her feet if he'd tried. I instructed him to pepper the kid, and I told the kid to do nothing but block. The main thing I had in mind was to get him so he could take a punch without blowing his top. It worked out pretty well, even if he did try to murder the lightweight the first day or two.

A week later Abbit had a spot for him in Dago. Three more of the boys were fighting, so we all packed into a sedan and drove out there.

The guy the kid fought that night was a slugger and nothing else. The kid was in and out like a wave, and at the round he had the guy hanging on. In the corner I told him, "I want you to give this guy a ride. Play with him, but don't butcher him."

"Why?" he said. "I can take him this round."



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"Why?" I said. "One reason because I tell you to. Two, because I want you to get used to being in the ring and using your brains. Box him. Hit him when you see an opening. And keep your mind on it. If he lands on you, all right. But he won't if you be sure to keep your eyes open."

He really carried this guy. His left danced and his right crashed through when he found an opening, which was often. About the middle of the third this guy caught him with a stiff left. The kid went back on his heels and pawed for the ropes. I saw that set look come over his face, and then, because he was turned so he could see me, I gave a slow shake of my head. He moved away from the ropes, grinning a little, and when he hit the stool at the end of the round, he said, "I almost got mad, Mike."

"You know what would have happened?" I said.

He nodded. "I lost one once to a guy like this. Not any better than this guy, Mike. He knocked me out."

"All right," I said. "You drop this guy the next round."

A minute later the kid was back in the corner, and they were holding the smelling salts under the other guy's nose.

About two days later the kid and I walked from the gym to grab some lunch. A voice called from the curb and it was Laura Tucker. She was at the wheel of a yellow convertible, and she looked like something out of those slick paper magazine ads.

"Hello, Joe," she said. "Hello, Mike."

I said hello and the kid mumbled something that didn't make sense.

"I've been shopping," Laura said, and just then a youngster came across the sidewalk carrying a load of bundles. The kid grabbed them, all fingers and thumbs, and helped the girl pile them behind the seat. When they were all back there, she rewarded him with a big smile. "Just for

that you two are invited to my party tonight," she said.

"Thanks just the same," I said. "Abbit's having a poker session, and I promised to be there."

She smiled at the kid. "You won't disappoint me, will you, Joe?"

"I don't know," the kid stuttered. "I'm not sure—"

"Go ahead," I said. I could see he really wanted to go. "You've been working hard. Now play a little."

"It's settled, then," Laura said. "Eight o'clock, Joe."

The car pulled from the curb and we stood there watching it go. Before it took the corner, Laura turned her head and waved. The kid hesitated for a second, then jerked his arm up so fast I had to duck.

After that there were two things in the kid's life: Laura and fighting. I knew he was seeing her, and that part was none of my business. What bothered me was how Vince Stratton would take it when he found out. He was back in the East, then, fighting a guy in the Garden, and I knew he wouldn't like it about the kid running with his girl. And he'd be just smart enough not to start anything out in the open. He's bait the kid, probably in front of Laura, and then the fireworks would start. I didn't want that to happen. There was too much involved. The kid needed more training. He wasn't ready for Stratton.

He had changed. That tight look was gone from his face. The rest of the boys were beginning to like him. He whistled in the showers. And when it came time to renew his contract, Abbit and I had a talk, and Abbit said okay.

WE HAD the kid a couple more fights around L.A. and then we went up to Frisco. He won each fight with clean knockouts, and it didn't bother him any longer if he had to take a

punch. I was riding high. I felt this kid and I were in it together, that what he was doing would maybe make up for what I had never been able to do.

We went to Oakland next, and he flattened a guy who had fought Vince Stratton the year before. He'd been getting a few notices in the local papers, and after that one a famous West Coast sports writer gave him a full column.

Back in L.A. Abbit told me he had a bout lined up with Jack Cowan, in the Legion Stadium. It was a main event, a real chance for the kid. Cowan'd had a go with the champ a couple of years back, but he hadn't been quite good enough. He was a rock of a man, barrel-chested, squat, thick-legged, and had enough fur on him to fill two pillows. He was mean and rough and loved to fight, and he knew all the tricks.

The next day I pulled the kid aside. "This fight goes on in two weeks," I told him. "From now on, no more late hours. No dates unless you're in the sack by ten. Okay?"

He looked at me for a minute. "Okay, Mike."

I could believe this kid.

The following days I showed him about raking the laces, butting, everything that wasn't in the book. I showed him how to do it and how to prevent having it done to him. "If I ever catch you pulling that stuff, you're through," I told him. "But from now on it'll happen to you, so you might as well learn." I was sick worrying about the coming fight, and whether or not the kid was cured. He'd never spoken of his life before coming with Abbit, and I'd never asked him. But sooner or later, with the publicity he was getting, it would come out. And I didn't even know what had started him fighting in the first place.

The house was packed the night of the fight. They gave the kid a big hand when he entered the ring. He bounced on his

toes a little and then went over and rubbed his feet in the rosin box, his gloved hands on the top rope, and his head bobbing around. Cowan entered the ring wearing a big grin on his battered face, and he looked ready. We went to the center for the parley, and then I removed the kid's robe. "Let me tell you something," I said. "This guy will try anything. He'll call you every kind of name you've ever heard in order to upset you."

His face went brittle while I was talking, and I turned and saw Laura and Vince Stratton directly behind the press row. I grabbed the kid's arm as Laura waved, and hustled him to the stool. I could feel him quiver beneath my hand. Jealous, this kid. Probably the first girl he had ever dated, this Laura. All I could hope was it didn't bother him during the fighting.

The first round went fine. Cowan was feeling the kid, and at the end of the round the kid seemed to settle down and get his mind on his work. He said nothing when he returned to the corner, and he didn't look to where Laura and Stratton were sitting.

In the next round Cowan tried with the laces, but the kid lashed a right uppercut that set Cowan back on his heels. It was the kid's round by a mile.

It went into the fifth, and the kid going good all the way. He flashed a hook to the midsection that had Cowan wobbling. He rammed the left after it, then came in with the right. Somehow, Cowan brushed it and clinched. They were right up there, in the kid's corner, and Cowan had his mouth going a mile a minute. I couldn't hear what he said, but whatever it was got to the kid. He was a wild man pushing away. I had a glimpse of his face, and that animal look was back. He went after Cowan and it was a windmill flaying at air. Cowan went on a bicycle, but he wasn't cut out for that sort of thing. Any other man would have jabbed the kid to

bits and made him run. But Cowan wasn't fast enough and the kid caught him with a right that cracked like a shot. Cowan went down and it was all over.

CHAPTER THREE

Hate Bait

WE DIDN'T speak in the dressing room. I cut the tape from the kid's hand. He had his head down, not looking at me, both of us knowing what a near thing it had been. He was trembling, and when I finished with the hands he turned to the showers without waiting for his rubdown. I let him go, thinking the cold water would do him good. There was a knock on the door, and the handler told me the reporters were outside.

"Let 'em in," I said, wondering if there was one amongst them who might have noticed. Some of those boys know their fighters.

There were three of them, breezy young guys with smiling faces and wise eyes. Finally the kid came out and they threw him the questions, the usual stuff you read in the papers. Then one of them said, "What was it Cowan said to you before you knocked him out?"

The kid's eyes glared. "Nothing," he said.

The reporter cocked his head. "You went kind of wild for a minute, didn't you?"

"I won," the kid said.

"I know," the reporter said. "But I've been following your style, and those wild punches you threw at the close weren't part of it."

"Maybe I'd like to throw a few right now," the kid said.

The reporter laughed. "You've been seen with Vince Stratton's girl. What's her name? Laura Tucker? It wouldn't be that Cowan made a crack about—"

I grabbed the kid just before he got within range of that reporter. They crowded to the door with knowing eyes. They had copy and they meant to print it. Before they went out, one of them said, "How about a go with Stratton? With the girl angle, you'd draw a—"

I couldn't hold the kid any longer, but by the time he got to the door, the reporters had slammed it shut and were beating it down the hall. I waved the handler outside.

"Okay, kid," I said. "What is it? What did Cowan say to you?"

"Mike," he said, and came to the table and laid flat on his back, his hands over his eyes, shielding them from the light. "He said if I didn't keep away from Stratton's girl, Stratton would pin my ears back. Mike, I went crazy. I wanted to kill him."

"All right," I said. "Now from the beginning."

He sat up. "Beginning?" he said.

"The beginning," I said.

"Mike," he said finally, "I never had it good. I never knew my folks. Not anything about them. First there was an orphanage, and someone telling me I was Joseph Hearn. I was fifteen when I got out of that place. Then there was trouble. . . ."

I listened, but I knew the rest by heart. Kids beating around the country, getting picked up for nothing and thrown into a reformatory. A tough guard, maybe. And then getting out of there the first chance they have and nobody waiting outside.

"That's why I turned to fighting," the kid said, and his face looked older than his years. "I couldn't stand bouncing from one place to another, never holding a job because I didn't know enough. I wanted to be somebody, and fighting was the only thing I knew anything about. I had to prove to myself that I was somebody, and not just a guy roaming around without roots. And if I couldn't prove it

to myself first, how would anybody else know?"

"You're somebody now," I said. "Your name is in the papers. How many guys get their names in the papers? You can be champ, kid. You can have everything, but you've got to have yourself in hand first. You understand?"

The kid nodded and we didn't speak. Finally he said, "Fighting and studying, Mike. That's my life from now on." He stood up. "I want Stratton," he said.

"For what reason, kid?"

"Because I have to hurdle him to reach the champ," he said. Then he looked away, then back to me again. "Mike," he said, "you're my friend. You're a good guy, Mike."

They gave the kid a big write-up in the morning papers. The one reporter mentioned about the kid losing his temper, and they all got it in there about the kid going with Stratton's girl. The afternoon sheets took it up with a demand for a Hearn-Stratton fight.

"What do you think," Abbit asked me. "Is the kid ready?"

"I need at least three months with him," I said, "but he'll be ready."

"I'll work on it," Abbit said.

A WEEK later he called me in. "Stratton is willing. So is his manager. The sooner the better they tell me."

I knew why. The more training the kid had the tougher he'd be to beat. "When?" I asked.

"They'd like it next month."

"Stall 'em another month," I said. "The kid is in good shape right now, but I want him to work against a boy with Stratton's style."

"I'll see what I can do," Abbit said.

The kid trained in the mornings and spent his afternoons at a private school outside the city. The bout was scheduled for the Stadium, so we didn't have to worry about traveling across the country before the fight.

One morning I had the kid working on the light bag, and he was really making it talk, when a voice behind me said, "Hello, Mike," and it was Laura. The first thing I wanted to get her out of there. The kid was all right now, and I didn't want him messed up again. I had my mouth open to tell her, but she smiled and walked right past to the kid.

"Hello, Joe," she said.

I walked away. If something happened through them being together, all right. I wasn't going to stop it. If Stratton wanted to bounce in here and make with the kid, it was his funeral.

That night in the hotel I hauled the clippings out of the top drawer. I read them, and I didn't have to see the print to do it. It was all there. All about a guy named Mike Mariano who had rocked the

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welterweight division some twenty years ago. And all about how he never reached the top because at the right time he had lost his temper and the other guy had slaughtered him, finished him for good.

But there was a lot more that wasn't in the clippings. It concerned a kid whose old man belittled him every chance he had, and would never let him try anything on his own, because the old man said he was a nobody. It took me a long time to find out that the old man was wrong, and a longer time to realize that the reason he'd acted that way was because he never was much himself. So this kid went out there with the idea of showing people he was somebody. And he fought so hard that he burned himself out, and I had the clippings to prove it.

Now maybe you understand what I felt about Joe Hearn, my kid. He was me, twenty years ago. He was giving me a chance to be part of something I'd always wanted to be myself. A champion. He was giving me that chance, and I wanted it more than anything else in the world, but I would not stop his being with this girl, not even if it spoiled my dream.

All the next week I kept watching him and seeing the change. He was happy. He bought some new sport clothes, took Laura riding in the afternoons, and to hell with the school. That was all right, too. The school could wait.

We didn't talk much about it. One day he told me that her brother Bob was still fighting, thinking he had a pretty good chance to end up in the money. Laura had asked the kid's opinion, and the kid had been honest with her, telling her Bob would never make the grade. But Stratton was getting him some good fights around, and I couldn't see it.

STRATTON was out of town. He had a training camp up in the hills behind Fresno, and I guess he was really working. He knew what the kid

was, and he was not taking any chances.

It was another couple of weeks before Abbit called me to the office. "We're signing the contract this afternoon," Abbit said. "Thought you'd like to be there."

"For what date?" I asked.

"Three weeks from today."

Stratton, his manager and Abbit were in the Commissioner's office when I got there. Stratton looked good. He had a dark tan and his eyes were clear. He was ready to do business, and no fooling.

"Where's the kid?" Abbit asked.

"He'll be here," I said, and then the door opened and the kid walked inside, and Laura right behind him.

I took a quick look at Stratton. All the skin pulled tight across his face, and his nostrils quivered. He stepped around the desk and faced her, not looking at the kid. "Hello, Laura," he said.

She kept her hands behind her, smiling up at him.

"Hello, Vince," she said.

The kid was standing to one side, grinning. When I caught his eye, he winked. Nothing bothered the kid right then.

The commissioner cleared his throat and everybody got busy signing papers. Understand, this was not a title fight, but it was close enough, the champ being what he was, to warrant a lot of attention. A couple of guys took flash shots and then it was over.

Stratton stepped straight to Laura's side. "Come on," he said, "I'll take you home."

"No, Vince." She was smiling. "Not ever again." Then she brought her left hand from behind her back and you couldn't miss the ice that sparkled on her second finger.

Stratton recoiled as if he'd caught a fast right hand below the belt. He turned to the kid and gave him a long, steady look that left no doubt about his feelings. Then, his manager behind him, he stormed outside.

We had congratulations all around, and I saw right off how happy these two kids were. It was a good thing to watch, but it was a worry to remember the way Stratton had looked at the kid.

Well, time passed and finally it was the day before the fight. I had the kid loosen up a little in the morning, and that was all. I stayed with him that day. We had a light lunch and then went up to my hotel, just hanging around.

About dark the kid wanted a walk, so we went around a few blocks, around past the Paramount and through a small park they have there. The kid was just right, a bit nervous, but that was to be expected. We sat on a bench.

"I want to get married after this fight," he said, "but Laura thinks it better we wait. What do you think, Mike?"

I thought it was pretty nice that he should ask me. "That's something I wouldn't try to advise you on, kid," I said. "Anyway, those things usually work out by themselves."

"Mike," he said, "I'd like you to stand up with me when it happens. I'd like to have you in my corner."

"I'd like that fine, kid."

For a long while we didn't speak, just sitting there and watching the people walking along, and the traffic running past the signal.

"If I beat this guy I'll be champ," the kid said, and it sounded like a little boy telling his friends he's getting a bike for

Christmas. The kid was grateful for what he had, and for what he was about to receive, and I liked that in him.

I got up.

"We'd better hit the sack, kid. A good eight hours tonight. In the morning the weigh-in, and it'll be ring time before we know it."

We started off down the street. There was a night club up ahead, with a striped awning stretching from the building to the curb. A cab pulled up just before we got there, and a guy in a fancy uniform came across the sidewalk to open the cab door.

The kid said, "Bob told Laura that Stratton is getting him a fight with Cowan. He shouldn't be fighting. He shouldn't—"

I grabbed the kid's arm and tried to steer him in front of a store window, but I was too late. We stood there, my fingers gripping his arm, looking at Vince Stratton and Laura walking into the club. The cab door slammed shut. The kid made a move to pull away, and I said, "Easy, kid."

For a second he didn't move. I could hear him breathing. Then he walked on, my hand still on his arm, and it felt as rigid as a pole. We walked right past the place, and he didn't even turn his head to look in.

"Don't jump at conclusions," I told him. "She's probably got a good reason for seeing him."

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CHAPTER FOUR

Wound-Up Belter

I DOUBT if he heard me. We went on to my hotel. I'd had an extra bed put in my room for the kid. I wanted him around, and the hotel was closer to the Stadium than his place. We went up in the elevator, not speaking. I got out my key and opened the door.

I turned on the lights, not knowing what to say. The kid went over and sat on the cot. His face was the way I'd remembered it the first time I saw him, full of strain, full of frustration. I know how he had it figured. Laura going out with another guy when they were engaged. And the doubts stirring in him, telling him he wasn't good enough for the girl in the first place.

And what can you tell a man at a time like that? Laura wasn't playing behind his back, I was reasonably sure of that, but my saying it wouldn't prove it to this kid.

Long past midnight he was still tossing on the cot. In the morning his eyes were dark hollows and the skin around his mouth was gray. Not a word came out of him, and I kept my own silence. I ordered breakfast, but he scarcely ate a bite. Later we went down for the weigh-in, and he didn't look once at Stratton. We went back to the hotel.

"Get some rest," I told him. "I have to take a run to the Stadium and check on things. I'll be back late this afternoon."

He was standing looking out the window, and he nodded his head in answer.

I wondered if I should call Laura and have her talk to the kid. Then I knew she'd probably call him, and I had a good idea he wouldn't give her a chance to talk. Anyway, the kid had to win it on his own. I felt it should be that way, no matter what. Nobody gets to the top of a profession without fighting something else

on the way. It just isn't in the cards. And if you think different, well, you're wrong. No matter how much I wanted the kid to win, I felt that way about it.

I got back around six. The kid was standing right where I'd left him. "Anyone call?" I asked.

"A couple of reporters," he said.

"They know better," I said. "I talked to them this morning. What did you tell them?"

"I threw the both of them out," the kid said.

I walked across the room. "How do you feel about this fight, kid?"

"I feel hate," he said. "I feel I'm gonna kill Stratton."

"You won't if you feel that way. He'll take you apart. You know how he fights."

He didn't say anything.

"This fight is more important than anything that ever happened to you," I said. "Whatever you're thinking about Laura is wrong, and it'll come out all right in the end, believe me. Anyway, that has nothing to do with the fight, and it shouldn't have. You listen to me," I said, "In about an hour we go out of here. I want you to leave here knowing you're gonna lick this guy, and nothing to do with hate and trying to kill him because you think—"

"Shut up!" The kid turned on me. "I'm not asking for advice. I'm fighting this one." He pounded his chest. "I'm the guy taking the beating in there. Don't tell me what to do. Not ever again."

He was getting me sore. "You think you're the only one involved in this fight?" I said. "You think just because you're all cracked up over nothing that you can tell everyone to go to hell? Well, you're wrong. I was fighting before you were born. It's my game, and it's been my game since I can remember. You think that doesn't mean something? I tell you now that I think you're a punk who doesn't deserve the championship, who doesn't deserve to win this one tonight."

I stepped to the dresser and pulled the clippings out of the drawer and flung them on the bed beside him. "Not any more than this guy deserved even to stay in the game," I said. "Read 'em," I said, "and maybe you'll learn what it means to carry something inside for twenty years."

I was trembling and I got out of there fast and went downstairs to the lobby. What did this kid know? I hated him in that moment. I hated him because I knew I hadn't lived it down, even if I had made myself believe it. But I hadn't. I had kept those clippings, never stopping to wonder why. And now I knew.

HE WAS down in about ten minutes. There was a puzzled look on his face. "I didn't know," he said. "You're the guy Stratton was talking about. I didn't know, Mike."

"Now you know," I said.

"Yeah," he said. "That was the big thing, wasn't it, Mike? That was the thing that mattered."

"It's over with," I said. "I blew it."

"Let's go, Mike," he said. "Let's walk part way. I think I'm gonna be all right, Mike." He was smiling a little.

We were in the dressing room, and the kid was getting ready, when the handler told me there was a girl outside. I went out there and it was Laura. I could tell she'd been crying.

"Mike," she said. "What's the matter,

Mike? I called Joe. He hung up on me, and not a word."

"Look, Laura," I said, "not now. We got a fight, and that comes first. Everything'll come out all right, no matter what."

I didn't tell the kid at first, thinking it would upset him again. And then I knew I had to, and I told him.

"Don't worry, Mike," the kid said. "That comes later."

We went down the aisle after the semi and Stratton was already in his corner. This guy was a fighter, believe me. No fooling around with this boy. He'd been at it for seven years and he'd learned his trade. He was aggressive. He could hit. He was fast and this fight would be a close thing.

They took it easy the first round. Stratton was wary. He'd watched the kid take Tucker apart with three punches. He was taking no chances. They slid in and out, trading lefts, then mixing it in a quick flurry of blows. The kid was still breathing through his nose when he hit the corner.

Each round was faster than the next. At the end of the fourth, the kid had a cut over his eye, and his lips were bleeding. He'd worked plenty on Stratton, too, and the guy was all red around the ribs.

The kid was leaning back and I had his trunks pulled out, fanning air down there. The handler sponged him, and I knew the

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kid was getting tired, that the lack of sleep the night before was beginning to tell. He straightened up and looked through the ropes and his face was still.

Laura was in the third row, and those two just sat there looking at each other, not smiling. Then the kid's face cracked a little and he dropped one eyelid in a solemn wink. For a second I thought that girl out there would break out crying. But instead the sun came out on her face, and the kid nudged me with his elbow and pointed and grinned.

"Keep your mind on the fight," I said.

"Shut up," he said, still grinning. "This is between rounds. My own business what I do between rounds."

The buzzer sounded. "Not for the next three minutes," I said, and went through the ropes and down the steps.

The kid went out and slugged Stratton below the heart. It was like when he'd fought Tucker, but this time he had it in the heart, not upstairs. Stratton went back, his mouth gaping, and the kid followed and rocked him with a left hook. The hook raked up along Stratton's nose as he clutched at the kid's arm. Stratton was against the ropes. He bounced away, low, bringing one up from the floor that caught the kid square on the chin. He went down, rolled over and struggled to his knees. He was up at nine, and pawing at Stratton, trying to clinch and give his troubled head a chance to clear. But Stratton didn't want it that way. He backed, came in again with everything he had. He was working short punches in there, making believe the kid's head was a bag, throwing them high, then shifting to the body when the kid brought his guard up.

The kid took it. He was plenty far gone, but he had his mind on what was going on. He came away from the ropes, sliding in the old way, coming beneath Stratton's guard, then straightening until they were slugging it toe to toe.

Stratton broke first. The kid followed

and hooked a left to the body. The crowd was going wild. Both of them out there were bleeding, and the crowd loved it. The kid hooked another to the same spot, and Stratton didn't like it. The kid threw another, and another, and then, with Stratton's elbows hugging his sides, the kid cracked the right straight from the shoulder, and Stratton went down, and I knew it was all over.

The dressing room was crowded for the next half hour, but I finally got them all out of there. Then there were just the kid and Laura and myself. They hadn't even had a chance to talk, and the kid was still in ring togs, sitting on the edge of the rubbing table, the girl standing in front of him, holding his taped hands.

"Joe," she said. "I was out with Vince last night. Is that why—"

He took her shoulders and pulled her close, their faces inches apart. He said, "Don't tell me anything unless you want. It's all right. Everything is all right."

"I had to talk to him," she said. "About Bob. About this fight he was going to have with Cowan."

"Was?" I said.

She looked at me. "I had to know if he was any good or not. He thought so because Vince told him. But Joe said no."

"So?" I said.

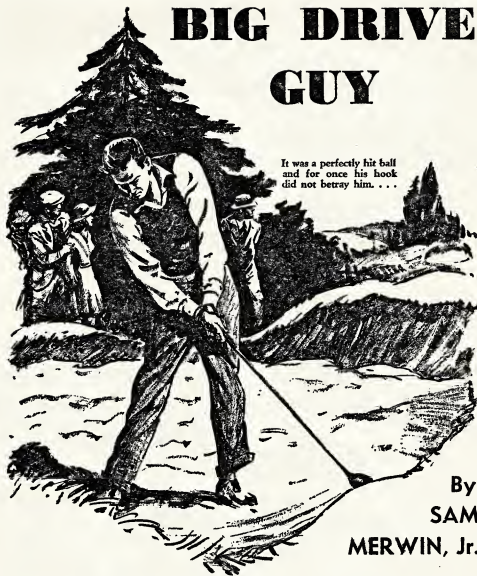
"So Vince said—" She paused. "Vince liked me. But when he saw how it was, he said the same as Joe, that Bob would never get anywhere in the ring. That's why I was with him," she said, and she was looking at Joe again.

And then their faces were together, and then apart again, and the kid kind of whispered, "Laura."

And then he pulled her around and looked across her shoulder at me. "I'm boss around here now," he grinned. "You get out. You got no business in here."

I got out. I had a job to take care of. It wasn't a chilly night, but then it didn't take those clippings long to burn.

BIG DRIVE GUY



It was a perfectly hit ball
and for once his hook
did not betray him. . . .

By
**SAM
MERWIN, Jr.**

NEIL RYAN stood well back on the sixteenth tee, waiting for Harmon Phelps to drive first. It was the highest spot on the entire Crest Top layout, the knob in the surrounding flatlands that had given the club its name. It wasn't actually very high—a scant hun-

dred and twenty-three feet, measured.

Ryan remembered its height exactly, as he remembered vividly everything else. The dimensions of the abandoned slate quarry that formed the core of the long dog-leg ahead of them. The crescent-shaped sand trap that embraced the distant

They fought it out down that last grim fairway—a champ turned chump who had to find one more taste of glory—and a kid from nowhere who had enough dynamite in his clubs to blow up any man's comeback!

green. And how most of the onlookers—paying guests and staff-carrying officials alike—had looked and behaved from a caddy's eye view a few years back.

Phelps straightened after teeing his ball and glanced quickly and covertly at Ryan before addressing the shot. It seemed to Ryan, watching the set of his big opponent's shoulders, the set of his usually loose-hewn mouth, that he wore an aura of tension. He had been playing grimly.

It was nonsense, of course. Tension had no place in an exhibition match. It had to be the inner knot of nerves within himself that was causing him to interpret other, less-driven folk in terms of fiddle-string tautness. Though Ryan had partaken of the homecoming luncheon they had given him as sparingly as politeness permitted, he felt like a cat with a hairball in his stomach.

The core of nervous misery had been part of him now for nearly three years—ever since he won his first important tournament money and realized that, if he kept winning, he could kiss Crest Top good-by. The other pros had it too, of course—even the guys like Nelson and Ferrier and the South African who had become old before his time. It was an occupational misery.

Ironically, he had come back to Crest Top to get rid of it. His game had been off edge and he had finished out of the money entirely in three of the last five big tournaments. So when he had received the invitation to play an exhibition match at the club where he had caddied and learned the game it had seemed like a good idea to accept.

"You'll miss the round robin," Terry had told him. They were dining in her apartment, overlooking New York's East River. Terry was a fashion designer and a successful one and could afford the best. She had come up the hard way, like himself, and she loved him. He wished he were as certain about her.

"The way I've been going I'd be lucky to make expenses," he had replied glumly. "A trip back to Crest Top with nothing at stake might be what I need."

"Hail, the conquering hero comes," she had said with a faint smile at the corners of her mouth. "Is it something like that, Neil?"

"Maybe," had been his reply, with an answering grin. "I want to show the big shots what a big shot I am now. Want to come along, honey?"

"And spoil your show?" she had countered. "No, you play out this hand alone."

Ryan had sensed that she knew there was more to it than that. She was a tremendous girl—woman, rather. Ryan knew he should latch on before someone else did. But there was always the memory of a girl who hadn't come up the hard way, but quite the reverse—a girl whose unattainability had tormented his dreams from the time he had been old enough to have them.

Rita Catherwood was her name and she was exactly Ryan's age, although, as a kid, she had looked older. Her father owned plenty. He had been a crusty old gaffer, always snapping at the caddies and reporting them for minor rules infractions. He had caught Ryan smoking a cigarette once back of the caddy house with another kid and had both of them up before the greens' committee.

Rita had come back there herself the next day and apologized for her father and smoked cigarettes with the kids, as if she were a boy herself—which she very definitely was not. Thereafter, Ryan had been sunk. Her full-lipped oval face with the laughing dark eyes and frame of dark curls had been, in some degree, the driving force behind every approach shot Ryan had laid dead to the pin, every putt he had dropped, every long drive he had hit into the wind.

And she was still engaged to this big

moose of a Harmon Phelps. Ryan watched with narrowed eyes as his opponent addressed the ball, facing well to the right of the direction marker. Phelps was going to try to clear the quarry with his drive instead of playing the long way around. It would take a two-hundred-ninety yard carry but he packed plenty of power in his beefy frame and the height of the tee and the tail wind would help him.

All at once Ryan hated not having the honor over the local champion. He the pro, the big name back to show the yokels how, should be taking the first cut at the ball. As Phelps prepared to swing Ryan ran back over the round, mentally checking the score. The big moose had been lucky and hitting the ball well. He must be lying fifty-eight, a stroke better than Ryan.

PHHELPS' club head came through with an air-stirring *swissssh* that was broken by the clean click of contact with the ball. There was an *aaaaah* from the crowd clustered around the tee and along the sides of the fairway to the green more than five hundred yards away. The ball went out and up with tremendous carry and the wind gave it extra lift. The *aaaaah* changed abruptly to a shout of approval as it cleared the far lip of the quarry and rolled to a stop on the fairway beyond the dog-leg angle, a hundred and fifty yards from the pin.

"Nice shot, Harmon," said Ryan through his teeth. All at once he was in the grip of cold anger, the icy rage of the born competitor when the chips go down. He heeled his cigarette and advanced to tee his own ball.

Until this moment Ryan, while conscious of the fact that his game was ragged, had not been worrying much about the match. He drew his expense plus a check for two hundred, come what might. Now, however, he realized that he was a shot down to his opponent with but

three holes to play and, thanks to the big showboat's lucky drive, might well lose another on this one.

He had been testing his swing, seeking the source of the hook that had been tormenting his game for two months. Now, determined to avoid defeat, he was going to allow for it. The risk, of course, was suicidal. It was one thing to hook or slice a ball intentionally. But to make allowances for such a flaw in play might mean complete loss of control over his game.

Still, he couldn't let Phelps beat him—not here, not today, not ever. He too faced far to the right and the onlookers gasped again as they thought he was going to try to match or beat his rival's shot. He played the ball more off his right foot than usual, hit it with every ounce of power he could muster.

It started toward the quarry, then veered left to land alongside it and roll with tremendous momentum over the clipped grass of the fairway. The crowd gasped, then groaned as, thanks to the hook, it rolled too far and disappeared into the trap bounding the far edge of the fairway, past the curve of the dog-leg. It totaled two hundred and seventy-five yards, but outside of catching trouble, it lay a good hundred yards back of Phelps' tremendous clout.

"Tough luck, Neil," said Phelps with a friendly shake of the head. It was odd, Ryan thought, how the big moose had grown more friendly with each hole. Maybe the damn fool thought he could take him. Ryan lit another cigarette and walked down the hump toward his trap, his face expressionless.

He wondered where Rita was waiting—at the clubhouse or, perhaps, at home. She had followed them around for the first nine, then left them with a gay little lift of the hand and a secret smile at Ryan that promised much. The two of them had managed a moment alone after the lunch-

con, before the beginning of the match. Or Rita had managed it, for he had made no maneuver.

"I'm proud of you, Neil," she had said softly. "Maybe, when you've finished the match, you'll come by the house. I'm alone there since father died."

He had nodded, unable for a moment to speak, and she had pressed his hand tightly and added, "I want you to beat Phelps. I want you to take some of the conceit out of him. Beat him, Neil, show him up."

"Hey!" he had said, finding his voice. "What gives?"

She had turned away, her dark eyes full, her voice muffled by its own intensity. "Just beat him, Neil. Then come."

THERE had been people then and, still wondering a little, Neil had gone off to play Phelps. He was, he realized, letting Rita down now, as he had let Terry and himself down. If he didn't take the match he'd make a local hero out of Phelps. The big moose would be better able than ever to push Rita's sensitive features in the mire of his own conceit.

Ryan felt the muscles tight around his eyes and mouth, deliberately relaxed them by taking deep breaths as he came up on his ball. It wouldn't do to let hatred tie him up too tightly. He stood on the lip of the trap, staring down at his lie in the sand, then called curtly for his number two wood.

He shut his ears to the gasp of the crowd as he walked into the trap, carry-

ing the brassie. Luckily they had raked the sand and not permitted the heels of the crowd to mar its surface. His ball lay nicely set up. Without waste motion he addressed it, waggled once and swung, hitting it on the nose.

It was a perfectly hit ball and for once his hook did not betray him. It cleared the front of the trap with a yard to spare, rose on a low trajectory and straightened out in its flight for the green. The scream of excitement that rose as it ceased to roll told him he had put it close to the cup.

Phelps made a mess of his approach, half-topping the ball so that it looked for a moment as if it would not make the green at all. But it hopped and rolled over the fairway until it finally caught one corner of the carpet and gave up. From where he stood Ryan could see his own ball—three feet from the flag! His second shot had more than matched the big moose's drive.

Ryan smoked another cigarette as Phelps lined up his putt. It was a thirty-footer and tricky. You'd have thought first place in the United States Open depended upon his sinking it for an eagle. The big fellow finally rose from a squatting position, took careful aim and made a couple of false starts before he could bring himself to hit the ball.

But the ball, once hit, cleared a ridge in the green, caught the angle just right and slid casually into the cup as if it had no other conceivable destination. Phelps ran a forefinger across his brow and shook sweat from it. The crowd applauded as Neil sank his short one.

— TO OUR READERS —

We are constantly experimenting in an effort to give you the very best reading surface obtainable. For this reason, there may be occasional slight fluctuations in the thickness of this magazine. Now, as in the past, every magazine bearing the Popular Publications seal of quality will continue to have the same number of pages, the same wordage, the same unparalleled value in top-flight reading entertainment that has been and will continue to be our Popular Fiction Group guarantee—the best reading value obtainable anywhere at any price!

Phelps of course still had the honor on the short seventeenth. Two hundred fifteen yards in length, its chief hazard lay in the fact that the green was almost three-quarters surrounded by a pond. Anyone who hoped to gain a stroke on par here had to hit the small peninsula and hold it with his ball.

Phelps used a two iron and made it, his shot coming to rest on the far edge of the carpet, just short of the water. He exhaled and looked for a moment as if he were going to sag to the ground with relief.

Ryan used his two iron, standing well around to the right to make allowance for his hook. He was going to have to catch the near corner of the green or roll past it. It was a hell of a way to have to play it. But he had no choice.

His jaws ached with tension as he swung. For a dreadful few seconds, as the ball soared out over the water, he thought he was going to miss, that his hook was not going to develop. Then it came and the ball broke sharply toward the emerald peninsula that was its target. It just cleared the water, bounded high as the long turf at the water's edge braked it, then trickled toward the pin. He got his birdie two after Phelps, lying away, fluffed his approach putt.

"You're getting too much left-hand into it," the big fellow told him as they walked side by side toward the final tee.

"You're telling me," said Ryan finally. "It's tough to correct it."

"I was reading in a Grantland Rice column the other day that Ben Hogan had the same trouble," said Phelps, clipping a daisy idly with his putter. Whatever had been bothering the big guy seemed to have left him.

"If all my troubles were Ben Hogan's I'd be up there on top," said Ryan. "That guy defies anything to be wrong with his game—and gets away with it."

"According to Rice he found his trouble

was laying his left thumb along the shaft," Phelps told him. "He tried wrapping it around instead and got rid of the hook."

"You mean like this?" said Ryan, lifting his club to show his rival the grip.

"That's what Hogan told Rice," said Phelps. He was friendly as-a big dog.

HE REALIZED that he had the honor and was first to address his ball. The driver felt loose, a little clumsy, as he tried the new grip. Funny, he thought, if this should turn out to be the answer. Getting a tip from Harmon Phelps of all people. He took an extra waggle, then checked an all but irresistible impulse to let his left thumb slide down along the shaft of the club.

The final hole was uphill, over a brook which cut the fairway a hundred and fifty yards from the tee. His ball was still going up when it cleared it and went on its way, straight as a string. It landed in the exact middle of the fairway some two hundred and fifty yards out, rolled almost another forty.

"Thanks, Harmon," he said, stepping back to let his rival shoot. "It may feel funny but I don't give a damn if it makes me hit them that straight."

"Honey of a drive, Neil," said the big fellow, moving up to make his own effort. He pressed a little, trying to match Ryan's perfect drive, and the result was a long slice that found the rough.

Ryan, walking to his own ball, felt a little baffled. He puffed on a cigarette and watched Phelps make his second shot, a beauty which rolled up just short of the deep trap that blanketed the front of the green. Something had been biting the big fellow, something that wasn't biting him any more.

He kept his thumb held tightly in its new position and the result was a perfect approach that descended on the green almost vertically, a scant five yards from the flag, hopped briefly twice and came to rest

almost in the cup. Well, he had partly re-deemed himself. An eagle and two birdies made a good wind-up.

Phelps aimed his short approach perfectly, but it was too strong. The ball was rolling hard as it hit the cup, bounded up in the air and then past by a good ten feet. He putted out and got his four and then conceded. Ryan tossed his ball to his caddie and then let the locals feed his ego. He had come in with a sixty-eight which broke the course record by a stroke. Phelps had a sixty-nine.

He looked around for Rita but she wasn't there. She was probably, he thought, preparing her version of a fatted calf for him in the big house on the hill.

Somewhat to his surprise he found himself alone with Phelps in the shower room. Phelps had already showered.

"Hi, Neil," Phelps said with a grin. "It wasn't a bad show, was it?"

"Not too bad," said Ryan. "You're hitting them okay, fellow." He paused, then asked the question that had been bothering him. "And you and Rita?"

"Still like this," said the big guy, holding up two fingers close together. He shook his head, then vigorously towed his wet hair. "I've been worried lately, of course. Take it from me—if you ever decide on a girl, don't let one of these long engagements get started.

"I don't mind telling you," Phelps went on, peering at his newly combed part, "that I've been worried lately. I thought maybe Rita was getting fed up—you know the signs. And the way things are set in this town I'd be in a hell of a spot if she turned on me. But I don't need to tell you about things here."

"That's right," said Ryan.

"Things haven't been too hot in my business lately," said the big fellow. "All in all, I've been sweating blood, what with the company losing dough and Rita acting skittish. But after what the two of you did today—

"Naturally I wouldn't have approached you," Phelps went on. "But just the same I was a sucker to make those bets. I don't have five grand in the bank right now—or, at any rate, I didn't until you carried me match play to the final hole. If I hadn't gotten an edge on the night before last, and decided I was Walter Hagen or somebody, I'd never have let them talk me into it."

Ryan began to understand for the first time what had happened. The picture was so ugly that it scared him. He thought of what he had so long thought about all these beautiful people—people who had had everything, whom he had, consciously, sought to pattern himself after.

"When I saw Rita talking to you after the luncheon I knew she was going to bat for me," the big fellow babbled on. "And when I saw how you rigged the match so that I'd last till the eighteenth and collect that dough, I— Well, Neil, it was a wonderful thing to do for both of us. That five grand makes all the difference. I can pull things out with it and then marry her."

Ryan got it now, all right—got it all. Phelps thought he had played slipshod golf to help the big fellow win that five grand. He thought of him, Ryan, as a tanker. Ryan felt sick to his stomach and stepped under the shower.

"Say, Neil," said Phelps, grinning like a monkey, "since you and Rita really ganged up to help me out of this one, how about we all sneak out of here and get together at Rita's? She'll love it."

"Ain't it the truth?" Ryan countered. He was, suddenly, almost desperately, homesick for Terry. Once he got behind the wheel of his car he was going to head for New York and Terry with no stops.

"Okay, Neil, I'll be seeing you at Rita's."

"Sure," said Ryan. "I'll be seeing you." He reached for the faucet and turned the water on full, shutting out all other sounds.



RAINCHECK

THE weather, as Mark Twain once remarked, is something everybody talks about without being able to do anything about it. To which might be added that quite often the weather plays a vital role in the affairs of baseball without anyone ever giving it much of a thought.

Usually, when rain causes a postponement on a so-called big day, the front office grumbles over the loss of a juicy pick-up at the gate. The fans are equally disappointed, the ball players and scribes are sore because it means the piling up of an-

lake cities, Detroit and Chicago. In the pivotal fifth game of that classic, a low line drive was rifled out to the Cub centerfielder, Freddie Lindstrom.

It wasn't a very difficult catch and Lindstrom, with a few quick strides forward, got his hands on the ball. But his numbed fingers couldn't hold it. He not only dropped it, but the ball had struck his bare hand with such force it broke a bone in his finger. Enough runs slipped home on the play to lose that game for Chicago, and with their star performer out of action for the remaining games, the

It isn't always good hitting, or ace-high pitching that decides a pennant—sometimes it's a guy named Pluvius, who plays in everybody's league!

other double-header, and everyone lets it go at that.

But weather has been known to be a far more vital factor. World Series games have been decided on wet, slippery turf, which on dry fields might have produced an entirely different result. Extreme heat or cold often have more than a mild bearing on the outcome of a ball game.

The Cubs and Tigers, battling in a World Series some years ago, had to play practically every day in near-freezing weather that had settled down on the two

Cubs dropped the World Series as well.

It was a drizzling rain that once taught the usually astute Branch Rickey that under such climatic conditions no spitball pitcher can operate. To be sure, the spitball has long since been legislated out of the game, but now and then there is talk of letting it come back, and if it does, you can rest assured the learned Prof. B. Rickey will never repeat the mistake he made one damp afternoon in St. Louis.

Rickey was managing the Cardinals at the time, and one of his top pitchers was Bill Doak, a master manipulator of the

By **JOHN DREBINGER**

now outlawed spitball. Should some of you younger fans of today be unfamiliar with this delivery, we'll explain it briefly.

It consists of wetting, with saliva, that part of the ball on which the two middle fingers rest, while the thumb and two outside fingers grip the dry part firmly. The ball receives a peculiar rotary motion as it leaves the tips of the two middle fingers first, instead of last, as in the normal delivery of a pitch.

Doak, at the time of this story, was extremely proficient in tossing that spitter, and on this particular afternoon, he was doing a beautiful job of keeping the enemy batters tightly bottled up. It was a dark, cloudy day, which added to the effectiveness of the weird twists that that tantalizing ball took as it sailed up to the plate.

But along about the sixth inning it began to drizzle. It didn't rain hard enough for the umpires to call time, but the light drizzle did dampen things, especially the ball.

So, just before going out to the mound for the top half of the sixth, Doak said to Rickey, "Better start warming up another pitcher in the bullpen, because I may not last long out there."

"Nonsense," replied Rickey, "you're doing swell. Your arm isn't bothering you, is it?"

"No. The arm feels all right, but the rain—"

"Oh, shucks," interrupted Rickey. "What's a little rain got to do with it? You keep right on pitching."

By now the rain was coming down in a fine spray. The visiting team really started teeing off on "Ol' Spittin'" Bill. Singles and doubles whistled all over the lot and in practically no time the opposition had five big runs over the plate and the ball game tucked away.

As Doak trudged to the bench after finally checking the rally, Rickey said ruefully, "Bill, it does look as though you had a premonition."

"No, Branch," said Bill. "It wasn't any premonition. All I had was a ball that was wet all over. That just wrecked the spitter. And without that spitter I'm just a five-and-dime pitcher. I never had a chance."

With no part of the ball dry to offer a firm grip for the thumb and outside fingers, a spitball pitcher is deprived of his trick delivery, and Rickey thereafter never forgot that lesson.

Even tight pennant races can be decided by the weather. Under the rules a pennant race ends on a certain date and no games can be played after that date unless there is a tie for the lead. As a consequence, should a team need a victory on the final Sunday of the race, and suddenly find itself rained out, that club is just out of luck.

SOME years ago something almost of the sort happened in the Southern Association as Chattanooga and Memphis came down to the final day only half a game apart. Chattanooga was scheduled to play its last game in Knoxville. Cloudy skies the previous evening made the prospects of the final game on Sunday somewhat dubious.

However, Joe Engel, enterprising and resourceful owner of the Chattanooga club, was not to be caught napping. On learning that the Knoxville club had no tarpaulin coverings for its infield, except a few little strips to cover home plate and the pitching mound, Engel had his own big tarpaulin trucked over from Chattanooga. It was promptly spread over the Knoxville ball park. It rained during the night, but the infield was perfectly dry when the rain ceased the following afternoon.

Umpires seldom have a more difficult decision to make than the calling of a game when rain interrupts, especially in a close contest where the lead is just about to change hands.

Frankie Frisch, managing the Pirates a few years ago, once tossed a crowd of fans into spasms of laughter by his antics in trying to get the umpires to call a game that was about to slip through his team's fingers. With the rain coming down quite hard, and with the Pirates' lead melting away with each drop, it would be to the Old Flash's advantage if the umpires called the game. But the arbiters, for some reason, remained obdurate and ordered play to continue while the irrepressible Frisch kept imploring them from his dugout to take one look up at the sky and see for themselves that it really was coming down by bucketfuls.

Suddenly he popped up on the dugout steps with a large umbrella. Opening it, he started parading in front of his bench shouting to the harried umpires, "Go ahead, keep on playing. If you dopes don't know enough to come in out of the rain, that's all right with me. I'm keeping perfectly dry." In the stands the drenched fans roared with laughter.

This proved too much for the arbiters, who interrupted matters long enough to order Frisch off the field, umbrella and all. Then they insisted on continuing the game until the inning was completed.

Unfortunately, the matter turned out badly for the Flash on all counts. For his Pirates not only lost the ball game, but the next day there came notification from Ford Frick, president of the National League, and one who frowns on such levities, that Frisch had been fined fifty dollars for having made a travesty of a championship ball game!

Usually, these incidents are not accompanied by humorous twists. At times such situations come up under extremely serious circumstances. For example, there was the final game of the 1925 World Series between the Senators and the Pirates, who were staking their all on their ace right-hander, Ray Kremer, against the Senators' Walter Johnson. Rain started

falling intermittently quite early in that encounter, which was the seventh and deciding battle of the Series. But with so much at stake the umpires felt they simply couldn't halt matters. So the two clubs struggled in the rain right through to the end, with the Corsairs finishing on top, 9-7. What the result might have been on a clear day and on a dry field is anybody's guess.

Pitchers, more than others, are usually most affected by rain, temperatures and wet or dry fields. Some hurlers cannot stand heat. Others fairly revel in it.

ON THE other hand, there are many hurlers who cannot stand excessive heat, and always run in to trouble when they have to pitch during hot spells. Hal Schumacher, famous Giant pitcher of a few years ago, always preferred it cool. A native of upstate New York where winters set in early and snows pile high in December, Schumacher invariably showed signs of wilting when the blistering days of July and August hit him. He was always at his best during the early months of the race and also in the September stretch drives.

During the torrid heat wave that hit New York last summer about the time the sizzling American League pennant race was reaching its boiling point, Lou Brissie of the Athletics appeared to have the Yankees definitely on the hip in a very important contest.

For six innings the plucky war veteran, who has to pitch with a plate guard covering his war-injured shin bone, held the mighty Bombers at bay. Then the heat got him and the Yanks closed in with a rush. They wound up winning the game, 6-4, when Connie Mack's relief staff fell completely apart.

One of the queerest twists ever produced by the weather came in the 1911 World Series, between Connie Mack's

(Continued on page 98)

DOUBLE OR

By
BOB REED



Shipley was clearly out. And
so were three of his teeth. . . .

"You can make every play in the books, except
the big one—the play where a rook lays his
heart on the baseline—no matter whose spikes
are in the way!"

NOTHING GUY

HAL MATLER said, "That's the way it looks from here, Brady. I'll have to let you go down to a good farm club." The manager of the Hawks leaned back in his chair and chewed on the cigar. "I don't like to, but it looks as if I have to."

Horace Brady said, "Why? You paid me a twenty-five thousand dollar bonus to sign, and I've been with the club three weeks. I'm batting two ninety-six and I've made one error. It doesn't make sense."

"The club has lost seven games in a row. There's something wrong and from here it looks like you. We're not a club that should lose seven in a row. We're a good club."

Horace Brady shook his head. "I don't understand. Why me?"

Matler leaned forward. "Maybe it isn't your fault, but I can't bother about that. It's just that the rest of the club doesn't go for you. You're from Harvard. These are gashouse guys. All of them."

"Just because I can read—"

Matler shrugged. "It's hard to explain. It's a club that should click, that was clicking before you came along. There isn't one of them, outside of you, that didn't fight his way up through the bushes. I just made a mistake signing you. I should have thought of it sooner."

"I've been playing good ball," Horace said again. He tried to figure the thing out. He knew that in a way Matler was right. He felt it on the field, in the clubhouse, on the trains when they were traveling. But he didn't know why.

"They're sore at you," Matler said. "Maybe they resent the way you talk, the way you act. I dunno. But they don't go for you. Maybe you could work with any other club in the league, but you can't work with this one. Hell, Brady, the

Showboat don't like you, and that almost settles it."

The Showboat! "Showboat" Blane, who *was* the Hawks.

Brady said, "The Showboat is a big bundle of air. He hasn't pitched a decent game since I've been on the club."

"He will," Matler said. "He's been pitchin' them for better than twelve years. He'll come through."

"He's the champion, all right," Brady said. "He can drink more beer than any man alive."

"He does pretty well," Matler admitted. "And he doesn't like you." He got up from his desk and shook his head. "It's no go, Brady. I'll have to ship you out. It's a shame, but that's the way it is. You're too much of a gentleman for an outfit like this."

Brady said, "When do I leave?" He felt his mouth tighten, his back stiffen. He didn't like to be fired from a job.

"In three days," Matler said. "There's a guy comin' on from the Coast—Augie Torell. You play out the series with the Blues, and I guess that's all."

"The Blues," Brady said. "The club you have to beat for the pennant."

"Pennant, hell," Matler said. "If we keep on goin' like we have been for the last couple of weeks, we'll be lucky to wind up in the first division." He headed for the office door. "I'm sorry it's working out like this, kid, but you can see my angle. They're all grousing about the twenty-five thousand you squeezed us for, they don't like your haircut or your clothes. They can't understand anyone being so polite, and they don't seem to want to play ball with you."

Horace followed him out of the office, walked slowly to the dressing room. Showboat Blane was just emerging from

the shower. The Showboat was a large man who ran to fat. He held a towel about his middle, now, and when he saw Joe he bowed. "And how is Mr. Harvard today?"

HORACE nodded. "Very well, thank you." He was preoccupied, seeking among the things Matler had said for a solution to this problem. He was with a big league team and playing well. He did not want to leave.

The Showboat bowed again, "It's nice to know that you're well. I was afraid that coarse fellow Sheldon had injured you, when he came into second to break up that double play, today."

Horace shook his head absently. "He didn't hurt me. Merely delayed my throw."

"Didn't he also cut your pants with his spikes?" Blane asked.

"Just a small tear," Horace said. "Nothing to speak of."

Blane dropped both the towel and his polished manner. "You shoulda jammed the damned ball down his teeth. He came in there ridin' to cut the legs off you. You shoulda sliced him."

Horace looked at him. "I see no reason to be violent when it is unnecessary. He was merely making the proper play in delaying my throw to first."

The Showboat shook his balding head. "It's things like this that make me lose my faith in baseball's future. What the hell the world is coming to I don't know. It's a good thing Matler is gettin' you out of here. The Blues would murder you."

Horace had not played against the Blues in the one trip around the circuit. He said, "I don't see why."

Harry Rexler, over in a corner, said, "Knock it off, Harvard. This is no league for you. In another week you'll be where the boys don't hurt each other."

Horace looked at the shortstop. He took off his cap and the glasses he habitu-

ally wore, on the field and off. Anger stirred in him. He said, "You seem to think that I'm afraid to fight. Let's see what you can do."

Rexler was a big man, rawboned but heavy. He stepped in fast, swung a heavy right hand and Horace went under it. He shoved Rexler off with the palm of his left hand and hammered his right to Rexler's head. The man went down against a locker.

He was up in a moment, his mouth full of blood and profanity. He rushed Horace, hooked a left to the head that Horace blocked with his right hand—a right which he promptly drove to Rexler's head. The man went back but did not fall.

He came in more slowly, this time, his mouth set. He stabbed with a left and missed, then threw the right. It was his last punch. Horace went inside of it, drove his own right to the body, then stepped back and hooked his left to the head. Rexler went down, cold as a winter morning.

Horace stepped away and eyed the rest of the room. Showboat Blane said, "Well, I'll be a—"

"You might very well be," Horace told him. "Now if there are any others here who—"

Eddie Brown, the big right-fielder, said, "I'd like to try a little of that, Joe College."

Showboat Blane said, "Whoa!" and held up a huge hand. "One is enough for the gentleman. One a day, anyway. He's done his little bit. Leave him be."

Brown eased off, and the rest of the club moved back to their lockers. Horace picked up his glasses from the bench. He said, "I happen to have been intercollegiate heavyweight champion."

"Brown would probaby murder you," Blane said. "But if we have any more fuss in here Matler will be in. Go take a shower and leave well enough alone. You got off with a full set of teeth. Go back to the hotel and rest up for the Blues. They'll

be in tomorrow with plenty of trouble for you."

And as Horace dressed, he saw that several members of the club were eyeing him with something a bit stronger than curiosity. He wondered about that.

H E HAD dinner alone and pondered his problem but came up with no solution. He liked the Hawks. When he had first come with them they had been a hustling, well-coordinated team. He had seemed to fit in well at second base, and it had been several days before he had sensed the hostility that seemed to arise from nowhere. Olsen, their regular second baseman, had been hurt three days before he'd come to them, straight from graduation. It had seemed like a fine opportunity, and he hated to lose it.

He went to a show, alone, and when he got back to the hotel he went straight to his room. It adjoined Blane's, and there was a connecting bath. He undressed, went into the bathroom to wash and brush his teeth. He could hear the voices in the next room clearly.

Blane said, "Okay, so I owe you three thousand. It isn't all the money in the world. There will be other horse races."

"But I want it, Showboat," another voice said. "I'm down and I want up. I can't live on credit."

"I'll dig it up in a week or so," Blane

said. "I'm not going to run away, Carlson."

The other man said, "No. Tomorrow. I need the scratch right away. Everybody that bets with me doesn't lose. I got to pay off, too."

"Where am I going to get it tomorrow? Give me a week."

There was a pause, and then Carlson said, "You know where you can get it tomorrow, Blane. I told you."

"I don't like it. I don't like it at all," Blane said. Horace could feel the distress in his voice.

"It'll be easy. Hell, the Blues are comin' in tomorrow. A terrific mob in town for the series. You can do it easy. Take a chance, Showboat."

"I don't like the whole idea," Blane said. "I told you that."

"It's worth the three grand to me. Just one game, Blane."

Horace could almost see Blane shake his head. "No soap. I told you before I'd never do it, and that's final."

"Okay. Have it your way. But I want the three thousand on the line tomorrow." The hall door of the other room opened, and Carlson's voice said, "If you change your mind before game time, let me know." The door closed.

Horace went into his own room and closed the door. He sat in a chair, stunned, sickened by what he had heard. Three thousand dollars, and Blane was slated



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to pitch tomorrow. It could mean only one thing.

He meditated upon it for a quarter of an hour, then he put on a robe and knocked on Blane's door. The big man said, "Yeah?"

Horace went in. Showboat was stretched out in a chair, a fat cigar in his mouth. He looked up and said, "What's on your mind, professor?"

Horace did it as delicately as he could. He said, "I happened to overhear your conversation with the man who just left. It was unavoidable."

"Horses," Blane said. "If the Commissioner got wind of it, I'd be on the carpet."

"I gathered," Horace said, "that horses were not the only consideration."

Blane looked at him and colored slowly. "How much else do you know?"

"I'm not altogether ignorant of the facts."

Blane rose from his chair, face clouded with anger. "Why, you snoopin' rat! I ought to—"

Horace held up his hand. "Wait. I believe I have a solution for your troubles. I do not like to see a man dishonor himself, I can lend you the three thousand dollars making it unnecessary for you to go through with this—this other arrangement." He couldn't quite put it into words.

Blane stared at him for a long moment. "You'd lend me three grand?"

Horace shrugged. "You were rather decent toward me in the dressing room today, and one favor deserves another. I'll have the money for you first thing in the morning."

Blane shook his head in bewilderment. "I don't get it, but I like it." He chewed on his cigar. "I'll pay you back within a month, Brady."

Horace nodded. "Good. We'll consider the transaction completed." He went back to his room.

HE DRESSED for the game with the Blues, next day, and the atmosphere of the dressing room was subtly different. No overtures were tendered him, but the air of active animosity was absent.

Rexler passed by. His mouth was swollen and there was a piece of tape over one eye. Horace said, "Rexler, I'm sorry if I—"

The big shortstop looked at him and said, "Skip it."

They went out on the field for batting and fielding practice, and when Horace went into the dugout for a drink of water, he spoke to Showboat Blane. "That money I gave you this morning. Did you—"

"Carson's got it," Showboat grinned at him. "We're all square, thanks to you, professor."

"Then today's game—"

"Today's game I can concentrate on winnin'. There's nothing else on my mind."

At game time they took the field. Showboat had warmed up, and when he went to the hill the fans gave him his usual big hand. They loved him. The big man took his cap off, bowed to all parts of the stands. The roar of affectionate laughter made Horace wince. If those people knew—

But there wasn't time to think of that now. These were the Blues, the traditional rivals, the most hated club in the league.

Blane had little trouble with them in the first. His stuff was working, and he put the side out in order. They went into the bench, and Matler said, "All right. Get some runs out there, you gents."

But Lefty Comstock was on the hill for the Blues, and he wasn't giving anything away today. He was bearing down on every pitch, and the Blues went out in order.

The first man up for the Blues in the second was Shipley, the shortstop. He

lined the first pitch into left for a single. Rexler called over to Horace, "If this bird comes down, watch the feet. He'll give you the spikes just for the hell of it."

Horace smiled at him. "Nonsense, Rexler."

Rexler said, "Watch yourself."

And Shipley came down on the second pitch. He was a big man and fast. Horace took the throw from Colton. It was low, almost in the dirt, and as he whirled he was aware of the ugly spikes ripping past his face, catching his cap and tearing it off his head. Shipley was safe. The man got up and dusted himself.

Horace stared at him, still holding the ball. He said, "You could have taken my eye out with that high slide, mister."

The man snorted and grinned at him crookedly. "Mac," he said, "that's your eye, not mine. You just keep away from that sack when I come down."

Horace looked at him for a long moment, then threw the ball to Blane.

Thomas, the catcher, singled, and Shipley scored from second. Terris hit a ground ball to Rexler, and the shortstop went to his right and grabbed it, flipped to Horace. Horace was on the bag in that perfect split second of time, whirled and made his throw to first for the double play. The runner was out by fifteen feet coming into second, and Horace ignored him. And he found himself flat on his back in the dirt. The runner had plowed right into him.

He got up. He said, "That was totally unnecessary, you know."

The Blue's catcher looked at him and spat. He walked off the field without a word.

Rexler walked over to him. He said, "Kid, why don't you get off the field before you get hurt? Matler can put Shorty Stubbs in here. These tomatoes will murder you."

Horace looked at him. "If you don't mind, I prefer to stay." A great, rosy

light was beginning to dawn upon him.

He batted sixth, and he came up in the second inning. He heard the Blues' catcher say, "Lefty, dust this bum and get him out of here."

And Lefty tried. He threw a hard high one aimed directly at Horace's skull, and he went back into the dirt to get out of the way. Behind the plate, Thomas roared with laughter.

The next pitch was a curve, low and breaking in to him. Horace laced it into left for a clean single. With two away, he got the steal sign and went down on the first pitch.

He had the base stolen. The throw was high and a bit wide, and Shipley took it. Horace hooked cleanly into the sack, and a full second later he felt Shipley come down on his leg. The spikes dug in briefly, and then were gone. He lay there, and Shipley grinned down at him.

Horace got up. The cut was nothing at all. He said, "Shipley, you will regret this." He was angry, now. He could feel his ears wiggling. They always wiggled when he was angry.

He took his lead, and Brown, following him at the plate, slashed a line single into right. Horace hit third, anger still burning him, and did not even look at the third base coach. He made his turn and headed for the plate.

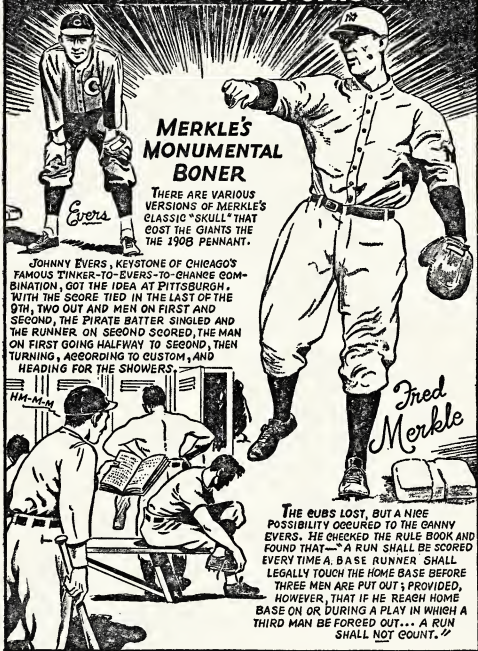
IT WAS going to be close. Thomas was blocking the plate, waiting for the throw. The ball and Horace arrived at approximately the same instant. Horace went in sliding. There was nothing fancy about it. He simply knocked Thomas halfway to the screen. The catcher lay there without moving, and the ball rolled idly on the grass while Brown took third.

Horace walked into the dugout, face expressionless. Ernie Morris, the big first baseman who had come to the Hawks fresh from the Coal Mine League, looked

(Continued on page 92)

BIG MOMENTS in SPORTS

by
Ben Nelson
STOOK'S ALLEN



MERKLE'S MONUMENTAL BONER

THERE ARE VARIOUS
VERSIONS OF MERKLE'S
CLASSIC "SKULL" THAT
COST THE GIANTS THE
1908 PENNANT.

JOHNNY EVERS, KEYSTONE OF CHICAGO'S
FAMOUS TINKER-TO-EVERS-TO-CHANCE COM-
BINATION, GOT THE IDEA AT PITTSBURGH.
WITH THE SCORE TIED IN THE LAST OF THE
9TH, TWO OUT AND MEN ON FIRST AND
SECOND, THE PIRATE BATTER SINGLED AND
THE RUNNER ON SECOND SCORED, THE MAN
ON FIRST GOING HALFWAY TO SECOND, THEN
TURNING, ACCORDING TO CUSTOM, AND
HEADING FOR THE SHOWERS.

THE CUBS LOST, BUT A NICE
POSSIBILITY OCCURED TO THE GANNY
EVERS. HE CHECKED THE RULE BOOK AND
FOUND THAT—"A RUN SHALL BE SCORED
EVERY TIME A BASE RUNNER SHALL
LEGALLY TOUCH THE HOME BASE BEFORE
THREE MEN ARE PUT OUT; PROVIDED,
HOWEVER, THAT IF HE REACH HOME
BASE ON OR DURING A PLAY IN WHICH A
THIRD MAN BE FORCED OUT... A RUN
SHALL NOT COUNT."

ON SEPT. 23RD, THE GIANTS LED CHICAGO BY A FRACTION OF A GAME AT THE POLO GROUNDS. MATHEWSON AND THE CUB'S PFIESTER WERE LOCKED IN A 1-1 PITCHER'S BATTLE WITH 2 OUT IN THE LAST OF THE 9TH. MCGORMICK ON THIRD AND FRED MERKLE ON FIRST.

EVERS, SEEING MERKLE RUNNING TO SHOWERS, STARTS SCREAMING FOR BALL HIT INTO CENTER.

BATTER

MERKLE SEES RUNNER SCORING, TURNS AND RUNS TO CLUBHOUSE.

IT WAS LIKE A RE-PLAY OF THAT PIRATE GAME AS THE BATTER SINGLED SHARPLY, MCGORMICK SCORED AND MERKLE TURNED HALFWAY TO SECOND AND RAN FOR THE CLUBHOUSE AS THE CROWD MILLED ONTO THE FIELD.

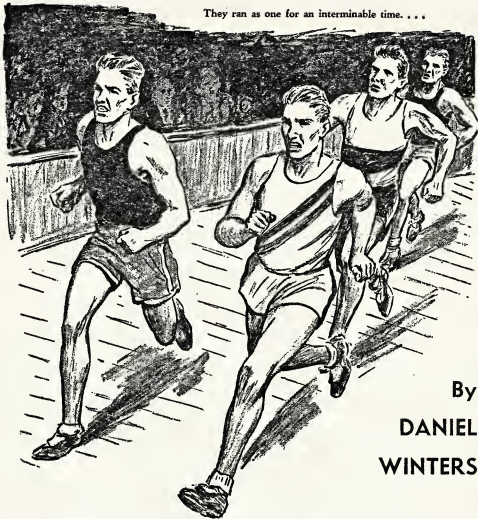
EVERS, JUMPING UP AND DOWN ON THE BAG, YELLED FOR THE BALL HIT INTO DEEP CENTER. THE THROW-IN HIT JOE TINKER ON THE BACK AND WAS GRABBED BY MCGINNITY, GIANT THIRD BASE COACH.

TINKER SAID PFIESTER TRIED TO WRESTLE IT AWAY AND MCGINNITY THREW IT TOWARD THE STANDS. A FAN POUNCED ON IT. FLOYD KROH RUSHED FROM THE BENCH, FLATTENED THE FAN, SEIZED THE BALL AND RAN WITH IT TO EVERS.

MORDECAI "THREE FINGER" BROWN SAID IT WENT INTO THE STANDS WHERE KROH FOUND IT. THE GIANTS CLAIMED IT WENT INTO THE STANDS, PERIOD... THAT THE ONE EVERS GOT WAS A WARM-UP BALL.

ANYWAY, MERKLE WAS RULED OUT, FORCED AT SECOND, THE RUN WAS NULLIFIED, AND THE GAME A 1-1 TIE TO BE RE-PLAYED IF NECESSARY. IT WAS! THE CUBS AND GIANTS FINISHED IN A DEAD-HEAT. IN THE RE-PLAY, BROWN BEAT MATTY 4-2 FOR THE FLAG AND CHICAGO WENT ON TO TAKE THE SERIES FROM DETROIT 4 GAMES TO 1 — BECAUSE MERKLE NEGLECTED A TECHNICALITY.

They ran as one for an interminable time. . . .



By
**DANIEL
WINTERS**

THE GUN LAP WAY

He sprinted into that last tough gun lap, fighting for the stretch kick he'd never owned — with courage borrowed from the guy he had to beat!

HORACE BEECHAM sat behind his fine big desk and said, "I'd like you to run, Dillon. Be quite a thing for Beecham, Inc., to have a one-two in the Golden Mile. Brayton will be in there, of course."

Jimmy Dillon looked at the fat man. He said, "I haven't run in a year, Mr. Beecham." He still remembered the last time. He could never forget it. He saw himself

again, sitting on the floor of the Garden just off the edge of the track, staring at the unholy whiteness of his shinbone as it protruded through the skin of his leg. He knew once again that moment when Brayton had brushed against him, tripping him, sending him off the track in a welter of tangled legs.

He said, now, "I don't know if I still can run. The leg—"

Beecham said, "Yes, I know. But the leg should be well again by now. It was just one of those unfortunate things, Dillon. You shouldn't let it hamper your actions in the future. The faster we can forget about those things—"

Jimmy said, "Mr. Beecham, what about the Peru job?"

"Ah, Peru. Oh, yes." Beecham rubbed his fat chin with a freshly manicured hand. "Well, I haven't made up my mind about that, Dillon. But I can tell you one thing." His beady eyes became a bit shrewd. "It's between you and Brayton. Haven't *quite* made up my mind."

Brayton. Always Brayton. Brayton to whip him in the Intercollegiates. Brayton to nose him out in the first Golden Mile he'd run, two years ago. And then Brayton to break his leg, jostling unobservedly on the last turn, the year before.

He said, "Well, I'll think about it, Mr. Beecham."

Beecham nodded. "Do that. And let me know in the morning. Be wonderful for the firm. One-two in the Golden Mile. Quite a stunt."

Jimmy went back to his own small office, and he was reliving the past, looking into the future. Brayton seemed to be in both places. The man was a shadow, and Jimmy couldn't get rid of him.

He sat at his desk and looked over the plans for the bridge job in Peru. He had never been in the country, did not personally know the terrain. But from months of studying maps and pictures taken from the air, he was as familiar with the locale as if

he had been born there and had lived there all his life.

It was his job, really, no matter how you figured it. He'd drawn the original plans for the bridge, had laid out the whole job. It was his baby, and it would be taken away from him because Brayton could run a faster mile.

His office door opened and Olly Fraser came in. Olly was a lean, bespectacled young man with not the slightest trace of reverence. He said, "Well, what did old Pot Belly have to say? He give you that Peru thing?"

Jimmy shook his head. "Wants me to run in the Golden Mile. Says the Peru job is between me and Brayton. He made it obvious that whoever wins the race gets the job."

Olly stared at him. "You kidding?"

Jimmy shook his head. "He practically drew me pictures."

Olly was indignant. "The man must be out of his mind. Here he's got the biggest engineering firm in the country, and all he thinks about is track meets. What the hell is wrong with him?"

Jimmy knew, but he didn't bother to go into it. Track was Beecham's hobby, and he had no other. He got a tremendous if vicarious thrill out of watching one of his employees win a race. He hired trackmen the way other people of his means bought race horses.

Olly lit a cigaret. "That Peru thing is strictly your baby. You nursed it and raised it from an idea to this final stage. It should be your job. And it would make you in the profession. You know that."

Jimmy said, "I know it. But he wants a foot race."

Olly shook his head. "Brayton might be able to beat you on the track, but he can't hold a pencil with you as an engineer."

Jimmy grinned without enthusiasm. "Listen. Beecham hired Brayton and me when we graduated from Tech together. He's got plenty of engineers. He figured

we were runners. He wants a little fun for his money."

Ollly snapped his cigarette out the window. "So he arranges things in such a fashion that your future hangs on a mile race." He looked at Jimmy. "Can you beat Brayton? Have you been running?"

"In the park," Jimmy said, "for about the last six months. Just because I needed the exercise and the doctors said it would be good for the leg. But no competition. As for beating Brayton, I don't know."

Ollly walked across the small room. "What about that guy Mulligan you were telling me about? The gent with the small construction company and the wonderful ideas. Why don't you quit this outfit and go with him?"

Jimmy shrugged. "You know why. This is security. This is where I'm set for the rest of my life. With Mulligan it would be a gamble." His eyes sought the window and the high-blown clouds, and in that sky there were dreams to be seen, too. He said, "But that Mulligan is a great engineer. We have the same slant on things. He's twenty years ahead of everyone else." He came back to earth. "But it would be a terrific gamble. The smart thing to do is hang on right here."

"I suppose you're right, but it's a shame you have to race a man to find out which one of you will build a bridge. Your bridge."

JIMMY met Mulligan for dinner that night. The Irishman was a huge and shaggy man with a voice like a fog-horn. He said, "Well, lad! Made up your mind to come along with me? We'll build the whole damned world over, starting from the bottom."

Jimmy looked at him and grinned. What the man said was almost true. His dreams and ideas were extensive, noble and reaching. Jimmy said, "Not quite. There's that Peruvian bridge job I was telling you about."

Mulligan nodded. "And a fine thing you'd make of it, boy. A great opportunity. I'm surprised that Beecham is going to use your advanced design. But it will make you, boy, a job like that."

Jimmy said, "He'll let me build it, if I can run a faster mile than another fellow."

"What's this?"

Jimmy explained. Mulligan looked at him and shook his head. "A strange way of doing things. And can you beat this Brayton?"

Jimmy shrugged. "I don't know. I don't think so." He thought again of the last time they had run against each other. He thought of the pain, piercing and long-lasting. He didn't know whether or not he wanted to run. But the bridge job was a prize that almost defeated his bitter memories.

Mulligan said, "Now if you *don't* win, Jimmy lad, there's something I have in mind. A job in Mexico. A bridge across a canyon so deep that the bottom of it must be the pit of hell. Boy, we can build a rainbow across the thing. I'll show you some sketches. I think I can arrange the financing, but—"

He went on, building his dreams, and Jimmy listened with half an ear. If he beat Brayton, and Beecham gave him the Peru job, his future was assured. With Mulligan he would be taking a chance. A hell of a chance.

But one thing he knew. He had to race Brayton. He had to give himself that opportunity.

And for the next three weeks he worked out on the Tech track, at night. The slight initial soreness developed and passed, and now he was running again in the same fashion that had kept him at or near the top of the heap ever since his junior year at Tech. The leg that had been broken gave him no trouble. The doctors had done a perfect job and the bone had healed splendidly.

A week before the Golden Mile he entered a race over in Newkirk for the competition he knew he needed. He was as fast as ever, his wind and legs were strong, but he was aware that he needed an edge to his running. He had to get the feeling of competition again. He needed that sharpening if he was to fool with Brayton, if he expected to win.

And Brayton was entered in the same race. Brayton and Holmes, Winnaker and Thomas. The same field that would run in the Golden Mile, with the addition of Jorgson, the great Swede, who had come to the States for that one big race.

At the Beecham offices, he did not encounter Brayton frequently. Tonight, in the dressing room at the Newkirk Armory, the man came over to him. Brayton was taller than himself, lean and clean-striding.

Brayton said, "Going to try it again, eh? You don't discourage easily, do you, Dillon?"

Jimmy shrugged. "A little exercise might do me good."

"And the Golden Mile? You're trying that one, too?"

"I thought I might."

Brayton smiled. It was not a pleasant

expression. "You wouldn't be thinking of that Peru job, would you?"

"Any objections?"

Brayton shook his head. "No objections. It's just that I figure you're wasting your time. The thing has been promised to me."

"I heard a little different," Jimmy said.

Brayton started to walk away, then turned back. He said, "How's the leg, Dillon? The one you busted last year in the Golden?"

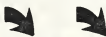
"It's all right," Jimmy said. A heavy shadow of fear walked into him.

"That's fine," Brayton said. "But you want to be careful of it. A thing like that might happen again, and it would be a shame. Give you a lot of trouble."

And Jimmy remembered what the doctor had said. They'd cautioned him about the future. Something about the broken bone cutting a couple of nerves that couldn't stand any more punishment, and that if the leg were broken again, the results might be very serious.

He said, now, "I'll be careful of it, Brayton." The man walked away, the trace of a smile on the corners of his mouth.

Jimmy warmed thoroughly between the other events. The big floor was unbanked,



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unlike the Garden track, where the Golden would be run. Eight laps to the mile, here, and a chance to find out if he'd lost a great deal of his running.

It was late in the evening when they lined up for the mile. Jimmy was on the outside, which was just as well. He'd win this one if he could, but that was not his primary purpose in running tonight. He simply wanted to get the feel of things.

And he confessed to himself another truth. He was out here tonight to see how he felt within himself about Brayton. To see whether or not he was mentally able to compete with the man who had injured him so grievously.

Holmes, on the rail, took the lead on the gun. He went out in front, setting a fast pace, and the rest of the field fell in behind him. Thomas was in second place, Brayton in third. Winnaker was fourth and Jimmy trailed him by two strides.

At the quarter he was feeling strong, his body had fallen into the rhythm of the thing. His wind was solid, his legs fresh. Trailing the field like this, he felt uncomfortable, for it had always been his custom to get out in front of the pack, make his own race.

He'd done that during the two years that he and Brayton had run for Tech. A pace-maker. It was because he loved to run, to get out there and feel the boards move back underneath him. And he knew, too, that was why Brayton had beaten him in every important race they had run together. The man had a sprint finish that Jimmy couldn't match. He'd trail Jimmy until the last quarter, or the last three hundred yards, and then, when the rest of the field was burned out, he'd put on the pressure, and Jimmy had never been able, quite, to stay with him.

EXCEPT in the Golden, the year before. They had gone into that last lap running under a blanket, pacing it out, stride for stride. Jimmy had hoped,

up to the last moment, to take that one. But then there had been the hip and shoulder moving into him, Brayton's left foot catching his own for that one, awful, infinitesimal part of a second that no one had seen, and then he'd sprawled on the infield, staring at the ugly piece of bone.

It wouldn't be that way tonight. He'd just follow along, feeling himself out, sounding himself to see if he still had it, giving his body the final sharpening it needed.

But at the half he forgot his resolve. The pace had slowed slightly. They were bogging down, and it was not to his satisfaction, it was not the way he liked to run. So he took over. He moved past the field, quickening his stride, and in half a lap he did not trail but led the group. They surrendered the post to him without argument. The fight would come later, he knew.

Through the third quarter he moved the pace up until he reached a point where he thought it was right. They were really hammering it out now, and he knew the time would be under four-ten. He was not in trouble yet, although his legs were feeling the strain and his wind was not what it had been. Those things were to be expected, and he was not alarmed.

He hit the three-quarter mark, sought within himself for an accurate appraisal of his strength, took it up another notch.

Holmes made his bid, then, and with him came Winnaker. Holmes got up to Jimmy's shoulder and hung right there, with Winnaker on his heels halfway through the seventh lap. Thomas, Jimmy sensed, was far back and out of it. He wondered about Brayton.

And Holmes slowly faded. It was a gradual thing but definite. He dropped back gradually, and he took Winnaker with him, and for a moment Jimmy was alone out there.

But not for long. With three hundred yards to go, Jimmy heard, above the roar

of the crowd, the sound of the feet behind him. It was an old and remembered sound, and those feet could belong only to one man. Brayton.

The man came up fast, as was his custom. Out of the pack and into second place, and then right up to Jimmy's shoulder. They were moving fast, now, upping the pace all the time, fighting for the last three hundred yards, the longest yards of the mile.

Jimmy heard the breathing at his shoulder as they went into the last lap, and it was just as heavy as his own. The boards were dragging at his legs, now, the tiredness setting in, and he felt as if he were running into the face of a strong wind.

But he had it. The strength was there, the wind was there, and he knew that tonight he could run Brayton right down to the wire. The year's layoff had rested him, strengthened him, and never before, at this stage of a race, had he felt so strong. He piled it on.

And Brayton stayed with him. The man was at his shoulder, running with him on the straightaway, fading just a trifle on the first turn. They came into the backstretch and Brayton moved up again and they ran as one man.

And just before they hit the last turn, Brayton sprinted, moved out in front by a foot. Jimmy put that little something extra into his stride and moved up, and then the turn came back to them. Brayton couldn't move in front of him without obviously fouling. The man had to keep his distance. He had no room to cross in front. If Jimmy held this position to the turn, he knew he had Brayton licked. For once on the last stretch he felt he had enough left to win with.

But as they came into the turn he remembered things. Everything. The initial shock, the long weeks of pain, the constant anxiety. It all came back to him in a flood, and with it came fear. And almost unconsciously he eased off in his pace. He

wanted no contest with Brayton in the turn. Brayton went out in front of him by three feet as they hit the turn.

THAT was all. Jimmy strode with him through the turn, trailing Brayton like a shadow. They hit the straightaway and it was a contest, perhaps, to the crowd, but Jimmy knew he was done. The break in his rhythm that had allowed Brayton to pass had ruined his race. He had slackened his speed and now he could not pick it up again. He fought Brayton down the stretch to the tape, but the man beat him by three feet.

He slouched to a stop, and Brayton came back to him and breathlessly slapped him on the shoulder. The crowd loved it, but Jimmy could see in Brayton's eyes that cynical smile. The man knew what had happened.

He showered in silence, took his rub and dressed. He felt empty and drained. He knew that his failure lay within himself and that fear had been born of memory. The future was a vague and cloudy thing and did not include the Peru job. It seemed to him at that moment unfair that a man's professional life should hang upon the matter of his courage and not his skill. He went back to the city in a bitter mood.

On Monday, Fraser came into his office. Olly looked at him and said, "Not so hot, eh, kid?"

Jimmy shrugged. "I just didn't have it."

Olly walked to the window and lit a cigarette. He said, without looking at Jimmy, "I saw the race. Took a ride out there."

There was nothing in his words except the simple statement, but Jimmy looked at him and wondered just what he had meant. He said nothing.

Olly turned from the window. "You still going to run in the Golden?"

"Why not?"

Olly looked at him, now. He shook his

head. "Nothing. It's just that I hate like hell to see that slob Brayton get the Peru job."

He went out, and the phone rang, and it was Mr. Beecham wanting to see Jimmy in his office immediately.

Mr. Beecham was all smiles. "A fine race, Dillon. Fine. And it gives me a fine idea how you'll operate in the Golden."

Jimmy looked at him without speaking, and the man went on.

"You'll make the pace," Beecham said. "You'll go out there in front and burn the Swede down, and Brayton will save himself until the last quarter. He'll come on with his kick, then, and if you have anything left, we'll still have first and second place."

Jimmy said, "It sounds very nice, but it doesn't do me much good, does it?"

"We're thinking of the team," Beecham said. "You should know that you have to forget about yourself in matters like this. I understand from Brayton that you ran that way in school—you setting the pace, then Brayton coming along in the last quarter with his fine sprint. We'll do it that way in the Golden."

Jimmy looked at him. He thought of the Peru job and he knew, at that moment, that Beecham had never intended it for him, anyway. But if he could cop the Golden, if he could forget the past and its pain and conquer his fear of Brayton. . . .

He said, "I'll do my best, Mr. Beecham."

The fat man beamed and nodded. "We can do no more than our best. The old team spirit, Dillon."

Jimmy went back to his office, and it was a bleak day. Mulligan phoned him just before quitting time, and Jimmy made a date with him for dinner.

The big Irishman was in a quiet mood. He looked at Jimmy and said, "I saw the race, lad. It was a close thing."

Everybody, it seemed, had seen the damned thing.

"That's right," Jimmy said. "Close."

The man's eyes were keen. "That Brayton. He must have hurt you bad, the last time out, eh?"

He knew. He could sense the difference between lack of running and lack of courage. Jimmy said, "He hurt me bad."

Mulligan lit a smelly pipe. "It's too bad. Too bad. Such things sometimes stay with a man. Stay long with him." Then he brightened. "But don't let it worry you too much. Do you lose that thing in Peru, you can come with me and we'll do the things we planned."

But it was not the same. He had made the offer again, but Jimmy knew that when a man like Mulligan asked a man to share the future, share his dreams, he wanted a man with courage. For the road ahead for such as them would be rugged and tough and filled with trouble, and a man would need a plentiful supply of guts to travel the full distance.

Jimmy worked easily that week, just loosening up. He'd been sharp for the race in Newkirk and he hadn't lost the edge.

THE afternoon of the race, Beecham had both Brayton and Jimmy in his office. He told them, "I have the whole thing planned. Dillon will run the legs off the field and the Swede, then you can come along in with that last-quarter sprint, Brayton. It should sew it up for us."

Brayton nodded. "It's all right with me. It's a good idea."

Beecham looked at Jimmy, smiling. Jimmy said, "It doesn't sit so good with me. Let Brayton run his own race and I'll run mine. I'd like a chance to win."

Brayton's eyes narrowed, and Beecham bounced out of his chair. He said, "It won't do, Dillon. I'll have you understand that I've worked this thing out in detail and I don't want the plan altered. You'll run it as I tell you to run it."

Jimmy shook his head. "You're not giv-

ing me a break. You know that the Peru job goes to the man who wins this race. I want a chance at it."

Beecham leaned back in his chair, his eyes half-closed, and Jimmy knew he was weighing the problem, figuring the chances. He came up finally with an answer. He said, "You'd be wise to think this over, Dillon. I don't employ men who won't follow orders. I want this race. Remember that, Jimmy Dillon. *I want this race!*"

Jimmy glanced at the walls of the huge office. They were lined with trophies, none of which Beecham had ever won. They'd been gained by men who had worked for Beecham through the years. Cups and medals of all sorts. He had in his mind to say to the man, *Well, why don't you run in it?* but he thought of the Peru job and held his tongue.

They went from the office together, Brayton and himself. The other man looked at him and said, "You were serious, weren't you? You think you have a chance to win this thing."

"You might get a surprise."

Brayton shook his head. "No surprises for me. But you'd better watch yourself. There are a hell of a lot of turns on that Garden track."

In the Garden that night Jimmy warmed slowly and easily. And just before the race, he heard his name called from a trackside box. He turned and saw that it

was Beecham. The man motioned, and Jimmy went over. The box was filled with opulent-looking people. Beecham was impressive in his evening clothes. He said, "Dillon, I wouldn't do anything foolish out there tonight if I were you." His eyes were hard, his manner cold. "I told you what sort of race I expect. I want that kind of race, and no other."

Jimmy looked at him for a moment, then walked away. The thing was getting tougher all the time.

They got the call, finally, and he shed his sweat clothes and walked to the line. They were all there—Winnaker, Thomas, Holmes, Brayton and the Swede, Jorgson. Jorgson was a lean man, blond of hair and pleasant of face. He nodded at Jimmy and smiled in a friendly fashion. Jimmy grinned back at him.

They had drawn earlier for places. Jorgson had the pole, with Brayton next to him. Thomas and Holmes came next, then Jimmy and Winnaker on the outside. The tension was building up, now, and the crowd was quiet and expectant. Jimmy looked once again at the banked, eleven-lap track, and the old thoughts kept coming back. Here's where it had happened. This had been the place. He had sat in the infield, right over there, and when he had looked down at his leg. . . .

The starter, lining them up, distracted him. He could think of nothing, from now on, but the race.

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The gun sent them away. The Swede, on the inside, wasted no time. He sprinted for the first turn, on the pole, and something about his stride told Jimmy that the man was where he wanted to be, where he intended to stay. Jimmy let the rest of them scramble for positions and fell into last place. There wasn't fifteen yards separating him from Jorgson when they straightened out of the turn.

The pace was fast, but it was a true pace, Jimmy knew. On the turns, he watched the Swede, out in front of him. The man had a beautiful running style, smooth, long and easy. He looked as if he could run all night. He was putting on the pressure, but doing it evenly, in a manner that showed he knew just what he was doing. The long legs stretched and scissored, the yards went by underneath him.

The field started to feel the pace even before the half. Thomas faded, then Holmes came back. Jimmy passed them on the outside, running strongly, his body attuned to the rhythm of the thing. It was Jorgson, Brayton, Winnaker and Jimmy, now, and just after they'd passed the half-mile mark, Winnaker put a hand to his side to relieve a stitch. Jimmy passed him. It was just the three of them, now. The Swede strode on, Brayton at his heels and Jimmy close behind. And Jimmy had not run a race like this before. The pace was just as fast as he would have desired it, but he wasn't making the pace, and it was a relief. He felt as if he were running on someone else's effort, as though he were being pulled along on a string.

He eyed Brayton, and only now could he appreciate the man's smartness. Jimmy had been pulling Brayton along like this for years.

And at the three-quarter mark, he decided to get rid of Brayton. Jorgson had lifted the pace a notch, and Brayton was a split second slow in following him. Jimmy took the opportunity offered. He put on a small sprint, went on ahead of

Brayton and fell in behind the Swede. The crowd roared out, and the Swede, sensing something going on behind him, lifted it another notch.

They were in the last quarter, now, and Jimmy had miscalculated Brayton's strength. The roar of the crowd warned him, and then the sound of the man's pounding feet was in his ears. He heard Brayton's breath on his shoulder, and then on a straightaway the man was even with him. They approached a turn, and Jimmy was suddenly a year in the past. He felt the tripping feet, the sprawling unbalance, the brutal shock of the leg breaking.

BUT, unlike a week before, he did not give Brayton running room. He raced the man for the turn, and they entered it as one. He felt Brayton veer toward him, and his guts were suddenly in his throat. But he did not fall back. He heard Brayton's snarled curse, but he was more interested in something else. His thoughts were not upon his leg, nor of what would happen if it were broken again.

He was filled now with anger he had not known in the past. Against Brayton, against Beecham, against the blatantly aggressive people who went to any lengths, used any means, to attain their miserably selfish ends. Brayton had used him in the past, used him cleverly. And when he hadn't fallen in with Brayton's plans, the man had not hesitated to push him out of the way, off the track.

And now he ran with Brayton, out of the turn, down the straightaway and into the next. He felt the slight diminution of space between them, braced himself for the shock of contact, even veered slightly toward Brayton, welcoming it.

And there was no contact. He went through the turn, running fast and awaiting disaster, no longer afraid of it now, no longer harboring fear of this man and his meanness, the ugliness of his nature. He

ran prepared and angry, and Brayton must have sensed his mood, for he committed no overt act.

And when Jimmy came out of the turn, he was on the Swede's heels and Brayton was in back of him.

He went for the Swede, then. He had a straightaway, one turn and the backstretch to catch him. He drew breath into his laboring lungs, tried to lengthen the stride of his tiring legs.

He caught the Swede just before they hit the turn. He came even with him and they slugged it out, and when they reached the turn the Swede was still on the pole. Jimmy clung to his elbow through the turn, not daring to fall back too far, knowing that to attempt to pass the man on the turn would be foolish. The turn started to straighten out and he gave it all he had.

They ran as one for an interminable time. Jimmy was not tired, now. He was dead. His legs were leaden, his lungs refused to take the air he gulped in for them. Through a blur he fought to maintain form, to quicken, lengthen his stride. He fought for a tape that came no closer to him until in one pain-racked moment it was just in front of him.

He did not jog to a stop. The strength was gone from him and his legs were through and they unwound slowly. He ran for a few yards past the finish line and then he was standing still, slouched, trying to suck air into tortured lungs. He had no legs.

And then things came into focus again, when he could hear the roar of the crowd above the personal roaring in his ears and in his heart. It was Mulligan's voice he first became aware of. The great Irishman was shouting at him, "A race, lad! One such as I've never seen. You legged it as if you had the peelers in back of you! It was magnificent!"

"Who won?" Jimmy managed to gasp.

"Ah," Mulligan said in his great voice, "who the hell cares?"

But he had won. He saw it in the faces of the approaching judges, in the strained but grinning face of Jorgson beside him. The man's hand was clasping his own, the Swede was saying complimentary things in a strange tongue.

In a few moments he was himself. He was still short of strength, but it was flooding back into him. He heard a voice calling and turned. It was Beecham, at the ring-side box. He walked over.

The fat man's face was flushed and wreathed in smiles. He shouted, waving his hand at the other people in the box, "I told them you could do it! I was with you every inch of the way!"

Jimmy looked at him for a long moment, then shook his head in a sort of sorrow and turned again to Mulligan. The Irishman was smiling. He said, "I'm glad for you, lad. It means the Peru thing, for sure."

Jimmy grinned at him and shook his head again. "Not for me. I'll work for no man like that. I'll go with you, if you'll have me."

Mulligan stared at him, then a grin spread over his rugged features. "You know what it means, lad. There's risk involved. You're taking a mighty big chance."

Jimmy said, "No. I'm taking no chances. Tonight I took a chance, and I almost lost. I wasn't running against Brayton or Jorgson or the rest. Against myself, and something small that was buried in me. Something Brayton had planted there a year ago. Something I was dreadfully afraid of."

Mulligan studied him. "And you won the race."

Jimmy nodded. He thought of the future, doing with Mulligan the work he'd dreamed of doing, the sort of thing which would never have been possible with Beecham. He knew how lucky he had been to escape that trap. He said, "That's right. I was lucky. I won."

THE BACKWARD FORWARD

CHAPTER ONE

Hardwood Vagabonds

THE big transport truck slowed down when it reached the outskirts of the town, and the driver jerked his head toward a sleek, silver-and-red diner on the right side of the road.

He said, "Get a pretty good meal in there, gents."

Duke Brandon fingered the dollar bill and the two quarters in his pocket. He said, "For how much?"

"If a truck driver can eat there," the man chuckled, "two pro basketball players can. It's reasonable."

The big truck slowed down and came to a stop a little past the diner. The Duke got down, a little stiff from the long ride. Red McGee followed him. They stood there for a moment, watching the truck



Five backboard bombers on a mission to nowhere—a blitzed-out coach flirting with the scrap pile—one last desperate gamble for both for dreams they couldn't let die!

Red McGee tapped in
another on a rebound. . .



By
**WILLIAM
HEUMAN**

roll away. The afternoon was cold and damp, and they'd been sitting in the cab of the truck for nearly five hours. They could feel it in their bones.

McGee said grimly, "Two pro basketball players." He added sourly, "Unemployed ones. You'd better land that coaching job, Duke, or we'll be eating our socks before the week is up."

The Duke smiled as they walked toward the diner. He was thinking that it wasn't much of a coaching job—a small high school in this mill town. It didn't pay very much, and probably nobody had applied for it as yet. He'd seen the ad in the Pittsburgh paper the evening before, and they'd hitch-hiked up to Ironton.

The high school job wasn't going to support both of them, but they'd noticed that Ironton had a pro basketball team in the state league, and there was the possibility they could both pick up extra money with the pros while the Duke was coaching the kids. Plenty of pro players were doing that.

As they went up the steps of the diner, Red McGee pointed to a poster on the door. The poster advertised the Ironton Comets-Leeberg Lions professional basketball game at the local arena. It was for tonight.

"Let's hope," the redhead said, "they need an extra man or two."

"I understand they play a pretty rough brand of basketball in these mill towns," the Duke observed as he opened the door. He heard McGee say behind him, "Ha ha."

He had to grin a little himself. Where they'd been playing basketball the game wasn't played any rougher anywhere else in the country. They'd starred for a pro outfit in Milltown, and they'd made pretty good money until two of the league officials absconded with the treasury and the organization had folded up.

Traveling around in pro circles for the past five years they'd had similar trou-

bles. In most parts of the country the pro game hadn't been established. To make sixty or seventy dollars a week they had to play half a dozen games in a week, double-headers on Sundays. They'd accumulated almost as many bumps and bruises as dollars in some of the games, and they'd been caught short of ready cash when the Milltown team disbanded.

SITTING down at the counter, the Duke ordered according to the size of his pocketbook. He ordered hamburgers and coffee, and as he watched the counterman slap the two hamburgers onto the hot plate, he listened to the two men talking at the table behind them.

Red McGee pricked up his ears, too, because he'd caught the word, 'Comet.' The two men were talking about the Ironton Comets.

"Bugsy Weil is tearing his hair out," one of the men was saying. "I understand Sam Lewis and Joe Divoti got stuck up in Fredericksville. Car broke down on the road. They won't be able to make it for the Lion game tonight."

Red McGee started to grin and rub his hands. He said softly, "Maybe I'll make that sirloin steak instead of hamburgers, Duke. We're in."

"Weil might have two other men lined up for tonight," Duke Brandon said. "Better wait, Red." He asked the counterman where he could find Bugsy Weil, manager of the Comets.

The counterman said, "You guys basketball players?"

"What do we look like?" McGee asked. "Badminton stars?"

They were both big, six feet, rangy. McGee's nose was bent in the middle where he'd come in contact with one of the old-fashioned backboard uprights. The Duke had knocked around since he was sixteen years old. He'd played semi-pro baseball, pro basketball in the seasons; he'd played with rough men. He'd taken

his punishment on the court and on the diamond, and he'd given back as good as he received.

"Okay," the counterman said, "Buggsy's usually in his office up at the arena this hour. If you guys got anything he'll be glad to see you." As he turned to look after the hamburgers he shot back over his shoulder, "Them Lions will wipe the floor with you anyway tonight."

"Is that so!" Red McGee said. "I—"

"Forget it," the Duke told him. They finished their meal and left after ascertaining the location of the Ironton Arena. They found Buggsy Weil on the telephone, howling into the mouthpiece, pleading with someone on the other end.

"I gotta put a club on the floor, Jake," he was saying. "I'm short two guys. Do me a favor, Jake. I'm your pal. This is a sellout tonight." He stopped and he looked at the Duke and McGee in the doorway. He held his hand over the mouthpiece and he said, "Who the hell are you guys?"

"Basketball players," the Duke said, "looking for work."

Buggsy Weil was a short man with a moist, perspiring face. He had a long nose and a receding brow. Biting off the end of a cigar, he sized them up rapidly, evidently liking what he saw. He said tersely, "Who'd you guys play with?"

"Milltown Harriers," the Duke said.

Buggsy Weil started to grin. It spread all over his face, and he actually wiggled in the chair as he spoke into the phone again.

"Hello, Jake? Listen, you schlamiel, jump in the lake!"

He banged the receiver down, and he said, "Fifteen bucks a game. A buck for every point you make over fifteen. If I like you there's a job with the Comets for you. What happened in Milltown?"

The Duke explained. He said, "I came here to take that high school coaching job, if I can."

"High school?" Buggsy asked. "Oh, that little dump down the street. They're payin' peanuts. Nobody around here wanted it."

"I see," the Duke said. He didn't show the disappointment in his face, but it was in his gray eyes. He wanted to coach basketball. At twenty-four, he'd been playing a long time and he knew the game from the ground up even though he'd only had a year or so of high school basketball before he had to get out and work for a living. Offensive and defensive tactics he'd learned the hard way from guys who make a living at it.

On the way to Ironton on the truck he'd thought about coaching, and the more he thought about it the more he liked it. He hadn't expected too much at the Ironton High School, but it was a start. A man who turned out a good high school quintet in a small school soon was coaching a good quintet in a larger school, and it was only one step from high school to college coaching. The college coaches were pulling down real money.

It was something to look forward to. He'd been drifting too long and he wanted to get settled. He'd seen too many pro athletes like himself without ambition, without a future of any kind, growing old in the sport, ending up cleaning out dressing rooms.

"You guys," Buggsy Weil said, "get back here at seven-thirty sharp. We got a tough one tonight an' we want to win it."

They went out and the Duke didn't say much as they walked up the street, looking for a rooming house.

McGee said, "What the hell's the matter, kid? We got this job, didn't we?"

"I was thinking about the other one," Duke Brandon admitted. "Weil didn't seem to think much about it."

The redhead laughed. "We got our break, Duke," he pointed out. "This thing fell right in our laps. Forget about that coaching business."

The Duke didn't say anything, but he recognized the dangers of that philosophy. A man never knew or admitted that he was old until it was too late and he'd been by-passed.

They passed the local high school, and the Duke slowed down. The school was small, of red brick, two stories high, with a six-foot picket fence surrounding it. It was nearly six o'clock in the evening now, and the school yard was deserted except for two tough-looking kids of about fifteen who were tossing a basketball up at an outdoor backboard in the yard.

Several lights gleamed in the building where a janitor cleaned up, or a teacher stayed late. The whole appearance of the place was unfavorable. It was small and dingy, tenanted by tough kids. It was in such a school in the East that the Duke had received his two years of high school education, and he knew the type of boy who studied here. He came of poor, half-literate parents; he'd become tough and cynical because he'd been denied the things other kids had. The good in him was gradually being eaten up by bitterness, rancor, envy, the things which destroyed the soul.

"Funny thing," Red McGee observed as they walked along the iron fence. "Some of these schools turn out pretty good basketball players. The kids get the wrong food, wrong training, wrong everything, but they know what to do when they get a basketball in their hands."

THEY found a boarding house, and they went back to the Ironton Arena at seven-thirty. The Duke got his first glimpse of the Comets. There were half a dozen men in the dressing room when he entered with McGee. Of the half-dozen, four of them were bandaged or taped in some way, somewhere. One man limped badly, and it was doubtful if

he'd even be able to play. A second man had his right wrist encased in tape, but he was getting into uniform. It was for this reason Buggsy Weil had put a hurry-up call through to a friend to send him a few players.

They were not too big, but they were tough, and they'd been around a long time. Two of them the Duke judged to be about thirty, and that was not young for a basketball player.

Buggsy Weil hustled in and introduced them, the cigar bouncing in his jaws as he spoke. He said, "These guys are from the Milltown Harriers. They were in a pretty good league."

One black-haired man with a long jaw and the face of a professional pugilist, said, "Yeah?" That was all.

Red McGee grinned at them, and the Duke got into his uniform without a word. He knew these men. They had to be shown.

One man said, "What about Lewis and Divoti, Buggsy?"

"To hell with 'em," Weil growled, "if these guys make out. They've been horsin' around too much with this outfit."

They went out on the floor and started to warm up. The Leebug Lions were already out, a big, bruising squad, nine strong, typical toughs. The Duke had heard that they were leading the league. The Comets were in third place.

One Lion player turned around to look at the two new Comets. He stood with his hands on his hips, a sneer on his face. He said, "Ringers, hey?"

"That's right," McGee grinned. "We're gonna put rings in your noses, kid, and lead you around like monkeys tonight."

A Comet player looked at McGee approvingly, liking this kind of talk. The Duke paid attention to his shots. The arena was filling up rapidly. It was not big, holding probably fifteen hundred people.

There were bleacher seats along both

sidelines and behind one backboard. At the other end of the arena there was a platform where the dance orchestra played between halves and after the game. Some of the musicians were up there now, warming up, also. It was a typical small league pro set-up, and it had been home for the Duke for a long time. He didn't want it that way all the time. Basketball wasn't played like this all over the country. There were places where it was a highly respected sport, played on shining hardwood floors before large crowds.

There was a lot of noise in the seats before the game got under way. The arena was filled now, and they were jammed up behind the backboards at both ends of the court. They were booing the Lions lustily, and the tough Lions seemed to like it.

A smiling, fat-faced man in a striped shirt came out on the court, bouncing a basketball. He had a whistle in his mouth and he blew it fitfully.

The Duke asked the black-haired man, Tip Cochran, what kind of defense the Comets used.

Cochran said laconically, "Man-to-man, kid." He said it as if he were surprised that the Duke had asked the question. There were occasional pro clubs which employed the different types of zone, but they were in the minority. It was man-to-man for the pros, one man dogging another, plenty of bodily contact, plenty of pushing, hacking, bullying around the court, and not too much whistle blowing. It was the kind of game the pro crowd liked.

The Duke and McGee were up at the forward spots, and the Comet crowd watched them curiously. McGee had said laughingly, "We'll get holy hell from this mob if we don't make good, Duke."

The ball went up between the two centers, and the Duke drove in. He'd drawn a short, stocky, sandy-haired man by the name of Flynn. Flynn wore No. 2

on his back. Flynn said softly before the tap, "Just take it easy out here, kid. Get rough an' you'll wind up in the top seats."

The Duke only smiled, recognizing this talk. Flynn didn't know it, but he was using psychology. He was trying to put the pressure on his man.

The ball went to McGee, and the red-head caught it, and made a deft twist with his body which nearly threw his man to the floor. He passed to the Duke and they were off.

The Comets were pretty good ball handlers, and the ball kept moving, with the Lions keeping close watch on their men, particularly when they got in close to the basket.

Flynn followed the Duke under the backboard, and when the referee was looking some place else, gave him a slight push from behind. Running at top speed, Duke Brandon had to take a few quick steps to prevent himself from catapulting into the crowd along the sidelines.

When he came up along the line, McGee, who had seen the move, said sourly, "He gettin' fresh?"

The Duke was smiling calmly. He called, "My man," and he kept running. Flynn crossed the court with him, watching him intently, a cold grin on his face. The ball was still flitting back and forth across the court as the Comets looked for an opening.

The Duke could almost read Flynn's mind. The stocky, pugnacious Lion thought he had his man buffaloed. That push had been the test. If he'd gotten a dirty look or a remark from his man he could expect to receive similar attention when he was trying to break loose, but the Duke had done nothing, said nothing. He was smiling.

CUTTING down the line again, Flynn grabbed at the Duke's arm, slowing him down, preventing him from cutting for the basket. There was no

whistle, even though it had been obvious to the spectators and to the referee.

Passing McGee this time, the Duke said, "Watch it."

The Comets were trying to work the bucket play with the center standing outside the foul line, taking passes, throwing them out again, biding his time.

The Duke slipped down the line toward the corner and then started in the direction of the basket, with Flynn dogging him again. He was moving very fast this time, as if trying to get clear, and then very suddenly he stopped abruptly in his tracks. McGee had the ball out in the center and was watching him.

Flynn, who had been going at top speed, was not prepared for the Duke's sudden stop. He slammed into the Duke's taut body and actually bounced back a step, a trifle dazed.

Red McGee whipped an overhead pass to the Duke, standing a few feet from the basket. The easy lay-up was good.

The Comet crowd howled gleefully, and Tip Cochran grinned approvingly.

Flynn snarled, "What the hell's the matter—you a wise guy?"

The Duke still smiled at him. The Lions had the ball now and they were coming upcourt. The Duke followed Flynn easily. He was the faster man, and he didn't have too much trouble.

THE Lions tried to work a screen on him, but he skipped around the stationary block, and he kept close to Flynn. The sandy-haired man tried another stunt. He pushed at the Duke sharply with both hands and then broke away in the opposite direction.

The ball was whipped toward him, but the Duke was in front of it. Snaring the ball easily with one hand, he tossed it to Larry Simons, one of the Comet guards. Simmons gave it to McGee, and the redhead whirled up the court, dribbling furiously, passing to Cochran. Cochran

bounced to Ed Michaels, and Michaels went up to the net with the ball. It dropped through for another score.

Red McGee scored the next one, a looping one-handed shot as he was swinging in from the right side, and then the Lions really started to get rough. McGee was tripped up once and he went down flat on his face. He was ready to swing when he got up, but the Duke caught him and stopped the fight.

"Too early," the Duke said.

The referee awarded McGee a foul shot and the redhead dropped it through the cords and they had a 7-0 lead, with the Comet crowd howling happily, booing the Lions.

It wasn't going to be as easy as that. The Lions came back with three quick scores from the floor. Flynn dropped one from outside, and they pushed in two lay-ups after neat screens.

The Duke came back with two field goals, one a beautiful left-handed toss from the corner as he was dribbling down the line, Flynn pushing and hacking at him, and the other a set shot from outside.

On the Comet bench Buggsy Weil was grinning, yelling, waving his cigar. At half-time the Comets led by a 21-18 score, and it was getting rougher every minute.

Twice McGee had been shoved into the crowd underneath the Lion backboard, and once Tip Cochran had gone over the front row of seats and landed among the spectators in the second and third rows.

They were giving back as good as they received. Flynn was tossed almost into the arms of an unperturbed policeman, standing with the crowd behind the Comet backboard. The officer's face showed no emotion. When the half ended the Duke saw Buggsy Weil go over and say something to him, and when the second half started there were three bluecoats near the door instead of one.

Flynn started to get real tough in the second half. He'd been hacking at the Duke's arms all through the game, giving him those awful pushes, shoving a shoulder at his face every opportunity he had.

The Duke dropped two more field goals from the floor, and then started to give his attention to Flynn. On a held ball on one occasion he picked Flynn off the floor and suddenly let him drop.

The Comet crowd got a big kick out of it, but Flynn got up, face red, lips drawn back. He said tersely, "Okay, wise guy."

It was repartee at its best, or worst. The Duke only smiled at him. He was dribbling up the sidelines a few moments later when Flynn got back at him. The Lion player charged from across the court, ramming full into him. The ball flew away and the Duke went over the first row of seats. He landed in the second row with his head in the lap of a brown-haired girl who looked down at him in some embarrassment.

"Sorry," the Duke said. He liked her eyes. They were brown, too, and she didn't use much make-up. There were a few freckles around her nose, not many, and they added to her attractiveness.

"Are you all right?" the girl asked.

"Never felt better," Duke Brandon said.

A bull-voiced fan a few rows above them roared, "Date her up after the game, Jack. Let's go."

Red-faced, the Duke scrambled back on the court. He'd almost forgotten about Flynn. The referee was giving the Comets an outside ball on the play, thereby recognizing the fact that it had not been cricket.

They started going again, and the Lions nearly tied up the score with a flurry of baskets. It was 39-38 for the Comets with four minutes remaining.

McGee already had had a short exchange of punches with the man guarding

him. Tip Cochran had swung and missed his man, and then the referee came in between them. The big rhubarb was still coming. The Duke could feel it.

Cochran, acting captain on the floor, gave the signal to start freezing the ball to protect that one point lead. They kept it moving every minute with the Lions crowding them, getting rougher all the time.

The crowd was in an uproar as the game drew to a close. They were standing up now, howling, and then it happened. McGee was roughly shoved into the seats. He came out swinging at the man who'd pushed him. Another Lion player swung at McGee, nearly knocking him off his feet.

Cochran leaped in and dropped this man with a short shot to the jaw. Flynn turned and charged the Duke, hitting out with both fists. The Duke slammed him in the belly with a left hook, doubling up the man. He grasped Flynn's head with both hands and shoved him backward. The Lion sat on the floor.

The referee was blowing his whistle, standing back a little so he wouldn't pick up one of the punches himself. Lion and Comet players were swarming from opposite benches, racing toward the riot. The Duke got a glimpse of McGee swinging away lustily, blood trickling from a cut on his mouth.

Another Lion player was in front of the Duke, full of fight, dodging and weaving, getting ready to throw punches. Coolly, the Duke jabbed him on the nose, jerking his head back, making his eyes blink.

The three bluecoats were in it, too, grabbing men, pulling them from other men. Buggsy Weil was standing up on the bench, shrieking. Tough spectators were swarming from the seats to get in a few licks themselves.

It was thirty minutes before order was restored. Six players went out of the

game, and it was finished a minute and a half later, the Comets taking it by one point. The Duke had been the high scorer of the evening with seventeen points to his credit.

When he'd been ejected from the game after the fight, he sat on the bench, looking across the court. The girl with the brown hair was still there, looking a little frightened, but determined. Two mill workers were at her left, and a boy with his father on the other side. She was alone.

The Duke said curiously, "What is a girl like that doing alone at a pro basketball game?"

"Who?" McGee asked. He was sitting on the bench, too, nursing his cut lip.

The gun went off, ending the game, and the Duke didn't have to answer. He stood up, his jacket around his shoulders, the perspiration drying on his body. A crowd of avid Comet rooters was around the bench, slapping the players' shoulders, yelling at them. He wanted to watch where the girl with the brown hair went, but he didn't get the chance. He was pushed with the others toward the dressing room doors.

In the corridor there was another brief flare-up when McGee and Flynn took a few punches at each other in parting, but it ended pleasantly, Flynn being half-carried to the dressing room by two Lion players.

McGee said, "A good game. Right down the alley."

Bugsy Weil was bouncing around the room happily, waving a fistful of bills, paying the men off. He gave the Duke and McGee extra fives for their efforts, and he said, "You guys play our game. You want to stay with us?"

They didn't have too much choice. The winter season was well under way now, and most pro outfits would have their line-ups intact. They'd been lucky to fall into the jobs.

The Duke said, "I guess you can count us in, Bugsy."

"I'm hopin'," Weil chuckled, "I can count us all in for the pennant, kid."

CHAPTER TWO

Dribble Dynamo

THE next afternoon at three o'clock the Duke went down to the high school with his clipping. He went in to see the principal, a harrassed little man with rimless spectacles, a very jittery little man who picked up one object and layed it down while he talked, and then picked up another.

He said, "Basketball coach? Oh, yes, yes. Of course. Basketball."

"I have a job playing with the Ironton Comets, the professional team," the Duke explained. "I thought I could coach the high school squad in between times."

"Yes, yes," the principal nodded, a vague look on his face, indicating that he knew nothing of the Comets. He wiped his glasses with his handkerchief, and he said, "You'll have to talk to Miss Crowley about this. It was her idea in the first place. I—I am not familiar with the details, of course."

"Miss Crowley?" the Duke asked.

"You'll find her in the gym," the principal told him hastily. "She will explain everything to you. Of course. Of course."

He located the gym down in the basement. He located it by the noise coming up from a stairway on the first floor. A whistle was tooting fitfully. The Duke opened a door and looked in. The court was not very big and the ceiling was rather low. There were quite a few boys scattered around the place, in basketball uniforms of every description. A practice game was going on, and the referee had the ball and was ready to toss it up into the air after a held-ball.

The referee was a slim fellow in gray

slacks and a white sport shirt. The whistle blew as he tossed the ball into the air and stepped nimbly back. The Duke stared. A man didn't usually have that kind of grace. It was almost effeminate. And then he saw that the referee was a girl!

Duke Brandon blinked as she trotted up the court, following the play, the whistle in her mouth. She had brown hair, tied up so that it would not fly around. She was rather pretty, with a few freckles around the nose. The Duke stared at her, and then he remembered. This was the girl he'd seen at the game last night—the brown-haired girl he'd fallen into when Flynn pushed him!

The kids out on the floor were going at it hot and heavy, and they weren't bad. They knew how to handle the ball, but there wasn't much cohesion. It was every man for himself and to hell with the other guy.

Standing back up against the wall, the Duke watched for several minutes. This girl seemed to know the game. She called a foul on one boy for hacking, and then she called time out for a few moments and she started to explain a few things.

Duke Brandon gulped. This girl was the coach! A boy on the floor had turned and was staring at the Duke. He yelled suddenly, "That looks like the new Comet guy!"

The Duke reddened a little as the girl turned to look at him. He watched her give the ball and the whistle to one of the boys off the court. She told them to get going again, and then she walked toward the Duke.

She recognized him. He could see that in her brown eyes. He said, "I—I guess you're Miss Crowley?"

"That's right," the girl nodded. "What can I do for you?"

"The principal sent me down here," the Duke explained. "I saw this ad in the paper the other day and I came over to

see if the job's still open." He handed her the small clipping he'd taken from the paper.

He saw the hope come into her eyes. She said quickly, "I'd almost given up hope that somebody would apply. The—the salary isn't very much."

"I understand that," Duke Brandon told her. "I have a job with the Comets on the side. If you think I can handle both ends at the same time I'd like a chance at this."

"I'm sure you could," Miss Crowley told him, "and we'd be very glad to have you, Mr. Brandon. This is the first year we've had a basketball team at Ironton High. We've never had a basketball coach or anyone interested in organizing a team."

"You seem to be doing pretty well yourself," the Duke smiled. "You know the game."

"Not too well," Miss Crowley grinned. "I played on our college team, but I've picked up more from watching the Comets. I—I was a little afraid to go alone at first, but I've been able to teach the boys so much more that I thought it was worth it."

"I see," the Duke murmured. He had this picture of a well-bred college girl, a high school teacher, attending the tough pro games, alone, so that she could get a few tips from the men who played it for a living.

"I've been at Ironton for two years," Miss Crowley went on, "and I've gotten to know the boys fairly well. They've needed sports in the school, and except for the baseball team, they've had nothing. I feel that we can develop a nice school spirit with a winning team. It'll be good for the boys. They need something in life outside of themselves."

Duke Brandon nodded. He was beginning to get the point now. This was a crusade, a plan to help the tough kids in Ironton, the kids who hung around the

pool rooms after school hours; the kids who had nothing to do all winter but get into trouble.

He didn't know very much about school spirit, himself, but he'd been to college games, and he'd heard the students cheering; he'd seen their faces and he hadn't quite understood it, but it was real, and it was good for them.

"I've persuaded the principal," Miss Crowley went on, "to lay out a little money for a regular coach. I've only been doing this temporarily until we could get someone."

"I'd like the job," the Duke said. "I've never coached a basketball team before, and I'd like to try it."

"You can start right now," Miss Crowley smiled. "We have our first game in four days, and the boys will need all the real instruction they can get."

The Duke took off his coat, and the boys on the floor watched him curiously.

MISS CROWLEY said quietly, "Boys, I want you to meet the new Ironton High basketball coach, Mr. Brandon."

They looked at him and then they looked at her incredulously. One boy yelled, "Wow!"

They crowded around then, just like any other kids, very pleased, popping questions at him. They wanted to know about the Comets; they wanted to know what kind of game they played in the pro league; where had he played before; what kind of defense was he going to use at Ironton?

"One thing at a time," the Duke grinned.

He got the whistle and he started the game again, watching each man carefully. One kid by the name of Rocky Dimara was the star of the squad, acknowledged by the others to be the top man. He was not too tall, but he was tremendously fast, and a good shot. This

kid had acquired his basketball acumen playing around a hoop tacked to a telegraph pole, ten boys jostling, fighting under one basket, giving it all it was worth.

Miss Crowley sat on the bench on the sidelines, watching him as he sorted the men. One kid had been on the second team, because he was a rather crude ball handler, but he had the knack of recovering the ball off the backboard, one of the most valuable assets a player can possess. He had terrific spring in his legs.

The Duke transferred him to the first squad, and the boy was tremendously pleased. The other kids saw that they were going to get a break, too, and they went all out to please him.

Before he knew it the clock on the wall said five, and practice was over. Miss Crowley still sat on the bench, watching, smiling. When he came over and the team had scurried for the dressing room, she said, "You handle them very well, Mr. Brandon. They like you."

"They're good boys," the Duke said.

The girl looked at him curiously. "You're the only one in this town besides myself who thinks so. They're supposed to be the bad boys in Ironton High."

The Duke shrugged. "Maybe I was a bad boy, myself," he smiled. "They understand me, and I understand them."

Miss Crowley nodded. "It's a good explanation," she said.

The Duke picked up his hat and coat where he'd dropped them on the bench. He said, "I don't suppose you'll be coming down to the Comet games any more now that you have a coach. We're playing the Wadeleigh Bears tomorrow night."

It was an invitation and she understood it. She smiled a little and she said, "I've always liked basketball. Maybe I should support the new Ironton coach."

"The Ironton coach would like it," the Duke said hopefully. "If you came down alone, I'd surely see to it that you didn't have to go home alone."

"This sounds like a date, Mr. Brandon," the school teacher grinned.

"You might call it that," Duke Brandon said, "and the name is Harry, or Duke."

"I prefer Duke," Miss Crowley told him. "You might call me Edith."

"I'll see you after the game tomorrow night, Edith," the Duke said.

"I'll be there," Edith Crowley said, "and it'll be a pleasure, Duke."

The Duke went out and he was walking on air. Back at the rooming house Red McGee was waiting for him.

"I think I'll need a little help tomorrow afternoon, Red," the Duke said calmly.

"Like hell," McGee retorted.

"Practice starts at three-thirty," the Duke smiled. "Give the boys a good example, Red."

"In a pig's neck," McGee said.

Red McGee was out at three-thirty the next afternoon, and he met Edith Crowley. He was impressed with the team, too, seeing the same things the Duke had seen. The Ironton High team had plenty of drive, and with the Duke working hard with the regulars, getting them to work for a score rather than for themselves, they would have a pretty good outfit in short order.

The Duke said to Edith Crowley after the workout, "This club should have regulation outfits. A good uniform gives a team spirit. They feel as if they're somebody, and it'll show up in their play."

"That's good psychology, Edith agreed."

"I don't know what it is," the Duke grinned, "but I've seen it work. Can we persuade the school board to lay out a few dollars for uniforms?"

Edith Crowley's eyes clouded. "I'm afraid not," she said. "I had a hard time convincing them that we ought to have a paid coach. If we ask them to put out more money they might decide to drop the whole idea."

"I see," the Duke said. He looked at

Red McGee, who was quietly listening in.

The redhead said tersely, "Do they wonder why these kids get into trouble? Here they're able to keep a bunch of them off the streets, and they don't co-operate."

"Someday," Edith said wistfully, "I'd like to see a big new gymnasium go up on this property, with several basketball courts. I'd like to see each class in the school have its own team, along with the varsity team to play outside the school. We'd have a good portion of the boys interested in sports."

The Duke looked at her, and she smiled back at him. She said, "I majored in sociology at college, Duke. That's the reason I came to Ironton High rather than a wealthy school. I want to work with people. I want to improve conditions for them."

"Right now," Red McGee observed, "we just need uniforms for our club to

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play in in its first real game next week."

The Duke didn't say anything. That night, before the Bear game, he approached Buggsy Weil. He said, "Buggsy, you place any bets on the Comet games?"

The Comet manager looked at him suspiciously. "Whose business is it?" he asked, "if I want to lay a few bucks on my boys?"

"I want you to place a few for me," the Duke smiled. He didn't usually bet on the games in which he played, but this was an emergency. "What are the odds tonight, Buggsy?" he asked.

"Even money," Weil said. "Them Bears are pretty good."

The Duke nodded. He said, "You're paying me at least forty-five dollars for the next three games I play for the Comets. Would you put that up for me on the Comets?"

Weil stared at him. He said, "Kid, if we lose tonight you don't get a red cent for a week."

"I don't intend to lose," the Duke smiled. "Do me the favor, Buggsy."

"Sure," Weil said slyly. "It'll be like insurance for my own bets, kid."

THEY had a capacity crowd again for the Bear game. Edith Crowley sat behind the Comet bench. About half the Iron-ton High squad was there, too, cheering for the Duke and for Red McGee.

It was McGee who broke the ice with the first score from the floor. The redhead dropped one while on the dead run down the left side of the court. He took a bullet pass from Tip Cochran and he swerved in toward the basket, netting the ball cleanly.

The high school gang went wild, and they had further cause to cheer a few moments later when the Duke went on a rampage, dropping three balls through the net in rapid order with Bear players hanging onto him, hacking him as he went up.

The quick lead that the Comets took seemed to upset the tough Bears. They were wild with their shooting, they missed baskets they should have made, and they were lax on the defense. At half-time the Comets held a 31-14 advantage, with the Duke already having hung up sixteen points.

The delighted Comet crowd gave the home team a great hand as they left the floor. Buggsy Weil walked beside the Duke, slapping his shoulder, grinning broadly. He was saying, "Any time you want to lay any dough on this club, kid, let me know. I'll put it up for you—all of it."

The Duke had twenty-seven points for his night's work when the final gun went off, and the Comets had a 59-43 win. Buggsy Weil handed the Duke seventy-two dollars, twenty-seven for the game, and forty-five as his share of the winnings.

The next afternoon a man from the local sporting goods store was at the Iron-ton gym when the squad came out on the floor. He was ready to measure eight of the regulars for uniforms.

Red McGee said, "I thought this school wasn't laying out any dough, Duke."

"They're not," the Duke told him calmly. "Santa Claus is."

Edith Crowley came through the door, carrying a brief case. She watched the proceedings for a while, and then she asked the sporting goods man, "Who is paying for this?"

The man was vague. "Store sent me down, lady," he said. "I don't know nothin' about it."

"A certain wealthy citizen, name unknown," the Duke said quietly, "is footing the bill."

Red McGee said slowly, "Buggsy Weil told me you won forty-five bucks on the game last night, Duke."

"Don't bet on sports," the Duke said. He saw Edith Crowley smiling at him.

She said, "You'd make a good sociologist, Duke."

"I can't even spell it," the Duke smiled, and he felt some shame for his lack of education. He'd been thinking about that, too. If he ever got a good job with a big college team he'd need some kind of background. It wouldn't be right for an ignoramus to be working with kids who had ten times the brain he had.

Ironton High had a night high school course, and he was thinking seriously of signing up and attending as often as he could in between the Comet games. He could get his high school diploma, at least, in a year or two, and then there was night college. There was no telling how far he would go when he got his break.

The Ironton team looked good in their new outfits when they took the floor for their first game of the season. The uniforms were scarlet and gray, the school colors. There wore sweat jackets to match, and the owner of the sports store had thrown in knee pads free of charge when he learned who the Duke was.

The first game was played at home, and a large body of undergraduates attended. There were no seats for them, but they stood just outside the court, a little scornful at first, until the Ironton team started to work on its highly favored rival, a high school from the next town.

Ironton rang up twelve points before the other quintet got near the basket, and the eyes of the Ironton undergraduates were wide. They'd come down to boo their own team, but when they saw this flashing attack and air-tight defense they started to cheer.

Duke Brandon and Red McGee sat on the bench, watching, grinning. McGee said, "This is something new for me, kid. It's almost as good as being on the court yourself."

Young Rocky Dimara was the spark-plug of the Ironton five. The dark-haired kid had wings on his feet and he couldn't

miss the basket. He had twenty-four points for the afternoon's work as Ironton walked away with their first encounter by a 61-39 score.

The opposing team's scorer came over to speak with the Duke after the game. He said with some disgust, "We took on Ironton because we wanted a few easy games at the start of the scholastic season. You crossed us up, Brandon."

"The boys had a good afternoon," the Duke said modestly.

"From what I could see," the other man observed, "they're going to have plenty of good afternoons this season. It doesn't seem possible that this is a first-year team. You act as though you were playing together for a long time."

"We probably will be," the Duke smiled.

"Unless," Red McGee added, "something else turns up."

The coach looked at them with interest. "A pair of young chaps like yourselves, with your knowledge and experience in the game, should go a long way," he said. "I know of plenty of high school openings. If you want me to recommend you, let me know."

"We'll do that," the Duke said. He saw Edith Crowley coming up with the school principal, her face radiant. Even the principal, a drab little man, was smiling broadly, evidently very well pleased. He'd come in for the second half and he'd heard the cheers from the Ironton students.

"I'll keep you in mind, Brandon," the coach said as he walked away.

Edith Crowley caught these words and she looked at the Duke curiously. The principal started to talk immediately. He said, "Is this the young man who has been doing wonders with our basketball team?"

"Two of us," the Duke said, nodding to McGee.

The principal raised his eyebrows. "At that salary?" he asked.

"They're not doing it for the money," Edith Crowley assured him.

The Duke didn't say anything. Red McGee looked at his hands.

"We make most of our living out of professional basketball," the Duke said.

"And Mr. Brandon is planning on entering our night school course," Edith said. "Aren't you, Duke?"

"We'd kind of planned on it," the Duke, glancing slyly at McGee.

The redhead nearly fainted. Afterward, he said, "How much education do I need to throw a basketball through a hoop, kid?"

"That's not the point," the Duke explained. "You don't want to be a dope when you get on top, do you?"

"Maybe," McGee smiled, "I'm a dope for trying to get on top. How do I know?" He added thoughtfully, "Maybe you are too, Duke."

CHAPTER THREE

Hoop 'Em, Kid!

DUKE BRANDON didn't say anything to that. The Comet schedule was hot and heavy the next two weeks, with a game nearly every other night, and two games on a Sunday—afternoon and night. During the next two weeks the Ironton High quintet chalked up four straight wins, giving them five in a row.

With each practice, the Duke noted improvement in the team. The kids picked up pro tactics and strategy with amazing speed. Within a few weeks they were working screens and pick-offs almost as cleverly as the pros.

The principal called the Duke up to the office on one occasion, his face beaming. He said, "Mr. Brandon, you have done wonders with the basketball team. There is an utterly new spirit at Ironton High. We have needed something like this for

a good many years. Miss Crowley has been discussing with me the possibility of building a new gymnasium to seat the crowds who want to attend the games. Naturally, this will entail considerable expense, and our school is not rich."

"I see," the Duke said.

"We feel," the principal went on, "that with the kind of basketball we play at Ironton we can draw big crowds from the surrounding areas, and that basketball will pay for the new gym. Our plan is to rent the Ironton Arena for the remainder of our games this season, and charge a nominal admission fee. Do you think you could negotiate with Mr. Weil for the rental of the Arena?"

"I'll talk to him," the Duke nodded. "The place isn't used afternoons at all, and we might be able to arrange a few night games when the Comets aren't playing. I think it's a great idea."

He told McGee about it, and the red-head smiled. He said, "That girl's got a head on her shoulders, Duke. She'll rebuild this town before she's finished."

Bugsy Weil was amenable to the proposition, and with a display of community spirit charged only a fair rate for the rental of the Arena. The Ironton High Wildcats played their first game, at night, three days later, before a packed house, and they ran away from a high-ranking Wadeleigh High quintet.

The Duke, sitting on the bench, listened to the applause from the big crowd as his team rolled up its highest score of the season. There was a smoothness to the Ironton offense which was equal to that of the Comets themselves.

Bugsy Weil said shrewdly after the game, "Hell, Duke, you won't be handlin' this club too long."

"No?" the Duke murmured.

"As soon as somebody needs a coach somewhere," Weil pointed out, "an' they get a squirt at this outfit, you're gettin' an offer, an' a good one."

Three days later he received his first offer, and it came from the directors of Wadeleigh High School. If he was free next winter, would he consider coming up to Wadeleigh? The contract called for seventy-five dollars a week, and he would still have time to play pro ball nights if he wanted to.

When he showed the letter to McGee, the redhead said, "Don't take it. There'll be more."

While the high school quintet was reaching new heights, the Duke and McGee paced the pro Comets to the league lead, much to Buggsy Weil's delight. The Comets hung up twelve wins in thirteen starts to go into the lead, but it was nip and tuck with the second place Lions. Coming into the homestretch of the season, they had half a game lead over the Lions with two games left apiece on the schedule, the last one with the Lions.

The Comets beat the third place Clowns to retain their half-game lead, and the next night the Ironton High Wildcats annexed their eleventh straight win, winding up the regular season, and with the win there was a bid to play in the state tournament.

The school went wild when the Duke read the invitation aloud at a large assembly meeting. Mr. Denton, the principal, publicly thanked him for his excellent work with the team, and the red-faced Duke walked from the platform, holding the telegram in his hand. He saw Edith Crowley smiling at him from her seat as he walked past.

She was glowingly beautiful.

That night there was a letter for him from Bradford College. They were sending a representative down to see him, having heard of his wonderful work with Ironton. Bradford was not a big college, and they could not afford too much the first year—no more than forty-five hundred a year!

The Duke read the letter, his heart

pounding. Bradford was not a big school, but it played the big schools on the basketball court. The door was open for him. He had but to turn out a few good teams at Bradford and he was in. There would be no long waiting for a college bid; he already had it.

When Red McGee saw it, he said immediately, "That's it, kid. You're in."

"I'll need help at Bradford," the Duke said. "You'll come along, of course, Red."

Red McGee moistened his lips. "We'll see," he said.

HE SLEPT till eleven o'clock the morning of the Lion game, and at night he was rested, ready to go all out. The crowd started to pile in at seven-thirty, with the game scheduled for eight-thirty.

They were all set to go. The referee was on the court, bouncing the ball up and down. The Lions waited down at the other end, five grim, determined men.

But Buggsy Weil had a speech to make. The Duke wasn't listening at first, thinking that Weil was going to announce something about a special benefit game they were planning a week hence. Then he heard his name mentioned.

There was a big cheer. Weil started to go on, but they wouldn't let him. The cheers became louder and louder. A guy was coming out on the court, carrying brand new leather traveling bags.

"These little tokens," Buggsy Weil was saying, "are given by the students of Ironton High in appreciation of the services of Duke Brandon."

The Duke stood beside him, looking down at the floor, face red, and there was a mist in his eyes. He could see these kids, all of them coming from comparatively poor families, dropping their nickels and their dimes in the kitty, buying him an expensive leather traveling set.

He saw Edith Crowley watching him from her seat behind the Comet bench.

The principal, Mr. Denton, was with her, smiling through his glasses, very pleased.

The kids really went to town when the bags were officially presented to the Duke. He made a little speech, just a few words, thanking them, and then he walked back to the Comets.

Tip Cochran said, "You got a pull with these kids, Duke."

McGee said, "They'd go right to hell for him, Tip."

The game got under way a few moments later, with Flynn again guarding the Duke, nudging, pushing. McGee took the ball on the tap, passing it to Larry Simmons. Simmons whipped it over to Ed Michaels, and they were off.

The Lions guarded closely, with Flynn actually holding the Duke's arms every once in a while when the referee had his back toward them. They fooled around with a bucket play, Michaels standing in the hole, taking the ball from outside, shooting it back, watching for the break.

The Duke worked a beautiful screen with Red McGee. Flynn bounced into McGee as he chased the Duke, and the Duke got away, cutting for the basket from the left side.

Michaels flipped him the ball. A Lion player switched and tore at him, but he was already going up with the ball. It was an easy shot, and he missed it!

A Lion took the ball off the boards, and they swept up the court, moving at a terrific rate of speed for pros. In fifteen seconds they netted the ball for the first score.

Flynn said, "Them bags go to your head, Duke?"

The Duke didn't say anything. He didn't know why or how he'd missed that easy lay-up, but he had. Two minutes later he was in close for another shot, having taken a nice pass from Tip Cochran.

He was coming in on the rim, dribbling beautifully, switching the ball from the left to the right hand, and then he went up, and he missed again.

Red McGee slapped his back in sympathy as they retreated up the court, the Lions taking the ball. The Duke knew what it was now. He was putting on too much pressure; he was straining to make good because the kids wanted him to.

For one moment a kind of panic struck him. He'd had occasional off nights when everything he threw up missed the rim, but he'd never worried because the next game it was just the opposite. Tonight he was thinking that perhaps there would be no next game. He was getting an offer to coach Bradford College, a big job, a high-paying job.

The Lions ran up ten straight points before the Comets hit the hoop, and a slightly crestfallen Ironton crowd had the opportunity to cheer. The Duke was missing with his shots. Time and time again he got up close only to miss those lay-ups.

He scored his first point halfway through the first half, and by then the score was Lions 18, Comets 9. The kids gave him a great hand. He was getting it from Flynn now. The tough Lion was guarding him very closely every moment, employing all the little roughing tactics of which he was capable.

The Comets played listless basketball. Sensing the fact that the Duke had lost his efficiency, they couldn't seem to get going. The spark in their attack was missing.

The Duke tried hard, but instead of getting better, he grew worse. His passing became inaccurate. He lost the ball dribbling, and he missed more shots. He didn't remember when he'd had a worse night on the pro courts. At half-time the score stood at 28-14, with the Lions on the heavy end.

They left the floor in silence. The Duke looked at the traveling bags in the dressing room, and then he sat down on the bench in front of his locker.

Bugsy Weil came in, glum-faced. He said, "We'll get goin' next half, gang." He didn't sound convincing.

RED McGEE sat down next to the Duke. He shook his head in sympathy and he said, "One of those nights, kid. You might snap out of it the next half."

The Duke smiled at him. It was just talk and he knew it. Red McGee knew it. When a man had an off night, it didn't last for one half. It usually took a new game, a new set-up to set him right.

They went out on the court to start the second half, and the kids gave the Duke a rousing hand just as if he'd scored thirty points that first half.

The Comet fans were still with him, too, knowing that it was one of those things a man couldn't help. There were no boos. The Duke took his position at the tap-off, and Flynn said to him, "The big hero's gettin' it in the neck tonight, kid."

The Duke smiled at him, but his lips were tight. He was hearing those kids cheer. They were still with him right to the end. He was their man. They were sticking with him, but he wasn't sticking with them. He was moving up to bigger money, bigger things. He was leaving them where he'd found them; he was leaving Edith Crowley in drab little Ironton while he moved into the more exclusive circles.

The ball was up in the air, and Ed Michaels got the jump, pushing the ball to Red McGee. The redhead slammed it at the Duke, and they went away. The Duke dribbled and passed to Tip Cochran. They went over the ten-second line, Michaels moving into the bucket outside the foul lane, waiting for the passes, the other Comet players cutting in, coming out again, keeping the ball flowing.

The Lions took the ball outside and started upcourt. The Duke ran with Flynn, keeping pace with him easily. He was watching the man with the ball as he covered his man, and he was ready.

Leaving Flynn, he leaped in front of the ball when it came in his direction,

grabbed it, passed rapidly to McGee. The kids let out a whoop. The Duke went up the court very fast now, taking a pass from Cochran, flipping it to Larry Simmons, darting around underneath the basket, with the gasping Flynn chasing him.

He took another pass from McGee as he cut for the basket, and he went high into the air, lifting the ball with his left hand. It fell through again—cleanly.

McGee said, "You got it."

The kids were going wild now, and the Comet players were grinning. They stepped up the pace, and the ball began to zip. Cochran scored from in close. Red McGee tapped in another on a rebound. Larry Simmons flipped one from the corner, and they were only four points behind the Lions.

The Duke scored again with a long shot from behind the foul line, and the Lions called for time to talk it over.

Tip Cochran said in the Comet huddle, "We have 'em running."

They kept it up when the ball was put in play again. The Duke broke away from Flynn and fed the ball to McGee darting in toward the backboard. McGee made it good and the score was tied at 28-all.

The Lions fought back desperately, scoring from the floor twice, and from the foul line once, giving them a five-point lead, and then the Duke came back with another field goal, a one-handed shot from the corner, and a foul throw after Flynn's deliberate push.

He was finding the net now, and it felt good. The Comets tied it up with Cochran's looper, and they went ahead when the Duke tore through the Lion defense and went up high with the ball, caging it for another field goal.

The Lions were working on him now, roughing him up every time he came in close to the basket. He was awarded two free throws by the referee, and he sank both of them. They elbowed him into the seats on another occasion, but he came



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back smiling to take a pass from McCabe and whirl in for another shot, and it was good.

It was 48-44 for the Comets with five minutes to go. Flynn looped a long one to put them two points behind, and two free throws, which were good for the Lions, tied it up at 48-all.

The kids were going wild up in the top seats as the Comets took the ball under their own basket and started up the court. Time was running out very fast now, and they had to make it quickly.

The Duke took a pass from Michaels and handed it to Tip Cochran. They worked the ball carefully, not wanting to lose possession of it before they'd made the score.

There was a fumble despite their care, and before they knew it, a Lion player was driving up toward the other basket with the ball, Red McGee close behind.

McGee made a lunge forward just as the Lion player was going up. He managed to block the throw for the basket, but there was a whistle, and the man received a free throw.

He dropped the ball through the hoop cleanly to give the Lions a one-point lead. During the next minute and a half it became almost a riot on the court. The ball changed hands three times. The Lions managed to take another shot at the basket, a ludicrously simple shot, and they missed it.

The Duke recovered the ball off the boards and started up the court with it.

Flynn met him with a football block just as the Duke went up into the air with the ball, pushing it toward the net. He didn't see the ball drop through the cords, because he was falling toward the floor, but he heard the noise and he knew it was good.

Flynn partially broke his fall, but he fell hard. There was the sound of a gun, indicating that the game was over.

The kids were streaming out across the floor, swarming around them, yelling. They had to fight their way to the dressing room.

They managed to get into the dressing room after a while, and the Duke sat down wearily. He looked at the luggage piled up near the locker and he shook his head. He said to Red McGee, "I never rated this, Red."

"The kids think so," McGee told him.

"I have a letter in my coat pocket," the Duke said, "offering me a job at Bradford College. I was going to take it."

"You only thought you were," the red-head said calmly. "That's what I told Miss Crowley. The school had a letter from Bradford, too, asking for a reference. They knew all about it."

The Duke stared. "Edith too?"

"She arranged this 'day' for you," McGee grinned. "I'm not supposed to tell you that, but I think it's better that you

know. I guess you know where you stand now, kid."

The Duke bolted for the shower room, and he came out in a few seconds flat and started to climb into his clothes.

McGee said, "She won't go away. She's waiting, Duke."

"She's been waiting too long."

As he was leaving the dressing room Buggsy Weil came in. Weil yelled, "Hey, Duke. There's a guy out here looking for you. A guy from Bradford College."

"Tell him," the Duke said, "I'm all tied up for a long time. I have a job."

McGee called after him, "She'll be glad to hear that, kid."

When he saw her face as she stood on the sidewalk near the entrance a few moments later, he knew that it was all right. She had been worried. When she looked at him her face lighted; she wasn't worried any longer. And Duke Brandon knew then that he'd done the right thing.

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(Continued from page 59)

at him and said, "Well, what the hell do you know about that?"

Showboat Blane grinned. He said, "Professor, you want to be a little careful out there. You might hurt somebody." They were carrying Thomas off the field.

And from the end of the bench Matler gazed at him intently.

They went into the seventh with the score tied. Blane struck out Boyle, then walked Shipley. The big Blue cupped his hands at first base and said, "Get out of the way, you four-eyed slob. I'm comin' down."

And he came, on the first pitch. Horace set himself well to the first-base side of the sack. The throw from Colton was perfect and waist high. He took it in his glove hand and swept it down with force. Shipley was clearly out. So were three of his teeth. He got to his feet mumbling incoherently, and his mates led him away.

Rexler came over from where he'd been backing up the play. The grin on his face was a yard wide. He said, "Prof, just how did you do that? I never saw anything so pretty."

"I don't like violence," Joe said, "but there is a limit to which one's patience can be stretched. Mine has been reached."

Rexler watched Horace's ears wiggle, then slapped him on the back. "Man, I'm goin' to like playin' with you out here. We can whip up some fancy ones between ourselves."

The score was tied in the ninth when Horace came up, the first hitter. Comstock was still on the hill. He looked at Horace, wound up, and threw him the duster again. Horace hit the dirt. He got up and walked to Comstock. He had dropped his bat, had taken off his glasses. Umpires rushed between them, and Horace was returned to the plate. Comstock threw him a curve ball, low, and Horace golfed it against the centerfield

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fence. He had plenty of room rounding the bases, and he pulled into third.

Brown looked at a couple, then fled out to right. Colton grounded out to short, and Horace had no chance of going home.

He heard the noise on the Hawk bench and looked over. Matler and Showboat were arguing in front of the bench. The fat man finally walked out to the plate, swinging a couple of bats, and Horace wondered why Matler didn't send up a pinch hitter. He decided Matler must have figured the game would go into extra innings, and since Showboat was going well, he'd leave him in.

Blane had a batting average, Joe knew, that was considerably smaller than his collar size. He hit a heavy ball, but his ambling run made him an easy out.

And Horace almost fell out from under his hat when he got the bunt sign from Blane. He looked again and it was on. Comstock heaved it in, and Blane laid down a perfect bunt along the third base line. Horace scored.

Stark, at third for the Blues, had been very deep. He came in on the run, and Showboat was a plodding monstrosity going down to first, huffing and puffing. Stark finally had the ball. He heaved it across the field with his buggy whip arm, and Horace held his breath. Runner and ball seemed to arrive at the same instant. Showboat hit the bag and fell flat on his face. The first base umpire was crouched, arms outspread, palms to the ground. Showboat heaved himself up on one elbow and grinned at him. The crowd started to take the park apart. It was the ball game.

IN THE dressing room, Brown, Rexler, Stein and Showboat were gathered about Horace's locker. He was singing, arms around the others, when Matler came into the room. The manager said, "Brady, just forget all the silly things I was talking about yesterday."

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NEW SPORTS MAGAZINE

Horace said, "Of course, Mr. Matler. I understand perfectly."

Later, going back to the hotel with Showboat, he said, "Showboat, old boy, that Carson business would have been a tragic affair."

"Indeed," Showboat agreed. "Tragic is the word."

Horace shook his head. "But I cannot bring myself to understand how you would even contemplate throwing a game."

Showboat stopped dead and stared at him again. "Say that again?"

Horace shrugged. "Your affair, of course. Every man the master of his own soul. Carson said he wanted only one game, and you—"

Showboat started to laugh. It was a tremendous undertaking, and it was fully three minutes before he could stop. He pointed to Horace and said, "And you thought—" He howled again.

Horace adjusted his spectacles. He said, "And what else could I think?"

Showboat placed a heavy hand on his shoulder. He said, "Son, slow down. I'll explain. Carson is a bookie."

"I gathered that," Horace said.

"He also," Showboat explained, "runs a girl's softball team out at City Park. He would like me to play a game for him. Me, Showboat Blane. He would pay me three thousand dollars for one game. He figures I would draw enough crowd so that he would make much more than that. He would have me play and cancel my debt. Me, on a girl's softball team. Can you picture it?"

Horace took it calmly. He studied it for a long moment, then relaxed. Everything, it seemed today, was working out beautifully. He said, "Come to think of it, you'd look unusual in bloomers."

They walked along, Showboat's arm around his shoulders. And Horace noticed something else. His ears had stopped wiggling.

DIAMOND DUSTERS

(Continued from page 8)

men bought the Boston Braves—then known as the miracle team managed by George Stallings. Percy Haughton, famed football coach of Harvard, was elected president of the club. Although not a baseball man, Percy took his position seriously and one day early in the season entered the clubhouse to give his players a lecture on the inadvisability of quarreling with umpires.

"Now," he declared, "it is all right to fight hard for victory, and to protest against a decision is in keeping with the game so long as you keep your tempers in bounds. But you must always remember that the team is the paramount issue. If a player is put out of a game by the umpire, only the team suffers. So, I would suggest that when you see one of your colleagues tangling with an umpire and the debate getting a trifle out of hand, you go up to him and say quietly, 'The team, the team.' That will impress on him at once that the team is the more important."

Well, that afternoon things went along smoothly enough until about the fifth inning when, with Maranville at the plate, umpire Bill Klem called a strike. The Rabbit jumped about three feet in the air and let out a terrific blast. In no time he and Klem were tangling in fine style, when suddenly out from the bench leaped a battalion of Braves led by Sherry Magee and Hank Gowdy.

Circling Maranville and the umpire, the players then began to jump up and down, shouting, "The team, the team." Red of face and certain these hardboiled Braves were making sport of him, Klem whirled on the group and roared, "Magee, you're out of the game. You, too, Gowdy, and you and you and you."

When order finally was restored half a dozen Braves were on their way to the clubhouse. Only Rabbit still remained at the plate. He presently popped out. Walk-

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NEW SPORTS MAGAZINE

ing back to the bench, he passed the
Braves' private box. Taking off his cap
and with solemn face he addressed Haughton
with, "You know, Mr. Haughton,
you sure had the right idea. Those fel-
lows certainly kept me in the ball game."

Needless to say, Haughton never took
it on himself to enter the clubhouse again.

Even the usually serious-minded and
austere Joe McCarthy is not above letting
his hair down and telling quips on him-
self. There was the time Marse Joe came
up from Louisville to manage the Cubs.

Holding his first clubhouse meeting,
things were going along fairly well when
Grover Alexander, a little the worse for
a convivial session the night before,
entered.

"Draw up a chair, Pete," said Mc-
Carthy, "we're just having a little talk
on signals." Alexander sat down, pulled
his hat over his eyes and to all appear-
ances fell sound asleep. McCarthy re-
sumed his discourse. He dealt at great
length on the importance of overhauling
the Cubs' entire system of signals.

"A lot of players who were with you last
summer," he said, "have now gone to other
clubs. We therefore must make a complete
change. Now, for instance, supposing we
have a man on second base—"

Snapping up out of his slumber and
pushing back his hat, Alexander drawled,
"Aw, hell, Joe, I don't think you'll ever
get that far."

That broke up the session with a bellow
of laughter while Joe went out "to kill the
guy who let that fellow into the room."

One afternoon as a drizzling rain began
to fall and the Pirates were holding a
slight lead over the Braves, Frisch popped
out of the Pittsburgh dugout imploring
the umpires to call the game. But the
officials declined to be hurried and allowed
the inning to go on.

Then suddenly, the crowd roared with
laughter. There, strutting nonchalantly in

DIAMOND DUSTERS

front of the Pirate bench, was Frisch with an open umbrella over his head.

"It's O.K., now, Beansie," shouted Frisch to Umpire Reardon, "you can play as long as you like. I just didn't want to get this nice new uniform all wet."

Unfortunately, the umpires didn't quite share the Old Flash's keen sense of humor. They ordered him from the field for making a travesty of the situation and the next day, to make matters worse, Ford Frick slapped a fifty-dollar fine on Frisch.

When, during those hilarious Dodger days when the Brooks were known as the "Daffiness Boys," Stengel was fired before the 1936 season opened, although his contract still had a year to run, Casey smiled broadly as he remarked to a sympathetic group of baseball scribes, "Just an old Brooklyn custom, boys."

He was referring, of course, to the fact that when he had succeeded Max Carey years previously, Carey's contract had another year to go. Now the same thing was happening to him as he gave way to Burleigh Grimes.

"You see, the Dodgers are the only club wealthy enough to pay one manager for managing and another one for not managing. What is more, they pay the fellow not managing more than the other one. I know Carey got more money than I did and I'm pretty sure I'll be drawing down more dough this year for not working than Grimes will for working."

There have been many others who managed to keep the laughs going even while engaged in the more serious business of winning.

Dizzy Vance, Paul Waner and Dizzy Dean were others who attained stardom without finding it necessary to sacrifice their sense of humor. They laughed easily, they made others laugh and yet, despite their flippant moments, ranked among the game's finest and ablest craftsmen.

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NEW SPORTS MAGAZINE

(Continued from page 53)

Athletics and John McGraw's Giants. Regular championship seasons used to run much later in those days, and this Series did not start until October 14.

The next day it rained, but the weather cleared off that night and the next two games were played on October 16 and 17.

The fourth game, set for the 18th, was scheduled for Philadelphia, but now the weather really took a turn for the worst. It poured all that day and the next and the next.

For one solid week it rained, while the athletes fretted in their hotel rooms, out-of-town visitors went broke and the scribes covering the Series almost went completely haywire as they strove to keep interest alive in an event the world outside of Philadelphia thought washed off the face of the globe. Finally, on the morning of the 24th, the heavens relented and the skies cleared. Two more games were played on the two successive days and on the 26th of October it finally came to a close, the Athletics defeating the Giants, four games to two. In all, the playing of six games had required thirteen days!

It was Dazzy Vance who exploded the fallacy that a speedball pitcher is always at his best when it is cloudy. Vance, one-time strikeout king of the National League, and one of the speediest pitchers of all time, pointed out that when the sun is shining with an unusually bright glare, the batter invariably has to squint his eyes, with the result that he does not get a clear view of the ball.

On the other hand, if it isn't too dark, merely cloudy, the subdued light permits the batter's eye pupils to dilate so that he gets a much clearer view of the ball.

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